
M/E/A/N/I/N/G

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THE RESPONSE AS SUCH: WORDS IN VISIBILITY

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Late at night, deep in conversation with my most intimate poetic collaborators, a question is asked, at first so tentatively that no answer seems called for, but then with a persistence beyond mere curiosity: What was your first textual experience?

Hearing so many thoughtful forays into the intersection of the visual and the verbal, I realize that this nocturnal question really must be a mask for another question: What was your first typographical experience?

Babbling as we do in the phonocentric illusion some call early childhood, where making and mimicking sounds brings the world into constantly (constitutively) new being, verging on the worlds we thought we saw the moment before but that vanish, like sibilants in dense fog, just as — just because — we invoke them . . . Into this paradise of entropic sounding comes the regime of order, the objects before my gaze grow labels, like in one of those intensely frightening Richard Scarey books where the bikes all say "bike" and the roads say "r-o-a-d" (*ceci n'est pas une lecture*). These visualized markers create boundaries on an indefinite expanse of plenitude, organize and stipulate and restrict where once there was potential and multiplicity. And where is "to" where "of", says the child, where is my little among-betweenwithin. For words are no more labels of things than the sky is a styrofoam wrap of some Divine carryout shop. And letters are no more tied to words or words to sentences than a mule is tied to its burden.

Letters in liberty, words freed from the tyranny of horizontality, or sequence: these are some of the impulses of a visually active domain of poetry. The visual dimension of writing is apparent from the first gesture of any inscription — the moment of making a mark, a sign that does not yet signify anything more than its process of demarking. In this first instance, the gesture of writing and drawing are identical — call it inscribing, as if we could scratch some meaning out of (or is it into?) the sullenly indifferent blank of the page that always confronts us just beyond grasp.

There are, it seems to me, two domains of poetry that are insufficiently recognized, too little attended to: the sound and the look. This is another way of saying that

A response to "Visualizing the Poetic Text," a double panel on the visual representation of language, organized by Marjorie Perloff; delivered at the annual convention of the Modern Language Association on December 29, 1990. Renee Riese Hubert presented a slide lecture on the use of language in Tpies and Twombly; Johanna Drucker gave a brief history of visual poetry in the twentieth century and presented her own bookworks; Ellen Esrock spoke on imaging and visualization in reader-response theory; Susan Howe discussed the graphic irreducibility of Dickinson's fascicles; Henry Sayre's topic was "Holzer in Venice."

poetry is too little attended to: sounds too quickly converted to words or images, the material space of the page too quickly supplanted by the ideational space of the text (as if MLA really meant “muted language association”). Too often, reading habits enforce a kind of blindness to the particular graphic choices of type, leading, page dimension, and paper, under the regime of a lexical transcendentalism that accords no semantic value to the visual representation of language. The poetic response to this derealization of poetry is to insist, against all odds, that a work can be composed whose semantic inhabitations are all visual; Cy Twombly’s work, as illuminated by Renee Hubert, suggests one such possibility, as do those works without visual poetry that do not employ alphabetic writing.

The idea that a text may yield up to a visualization of what it purports to represent is a primary example of what Ron Silliman, in his essay “The Disappearance of the Word / The Appearance of the World,” calls the transparency effect. Still, an important distinction needs to be made between, on the one hand, derealizations of textuality — that is readings that discount sound sense or the visual materiality of the page, or both — and, on the other hand, works that encourage proactive visualizations of images, that is, visualizations that are constructed by the reader in the process of puzzling through the linguistic material presented. In contrast, the transparency effect describes the conjuring of visual images or nonvisual ideational content, without generally focussing on the importance of the distinction between these two forms of the effect.

Certainly, a primary effort of much formally innovative poetry over the last 20 years has been to insist on melopoeia (sound play), syntaxapoeia (play of syntax), and parapoeia (the play of parataxis, parody, and invented structure) — over phanopoeia (image play, which might be better called videopoeia or indeed visualization) and logorrhea (the endless repetition of the already known, whether received forms or contents). The transparency effect suggests a diagnosis of both phonophobia (fear of sound) and misography (belief in the inferiority of the visual component of language and the superiority of the ideational component of language). In the case of Johanna Drucker’s sumptuous series of books, we confront the materiality of the visual representation of language over the videopoiesis or logopoeia. Though, as a hyperbophiliac, I overstate it to say look and sound over ideas or visualizations: rather the insistence has been to ground the one in the other, not let the latter mute or repress the former.

This project has, therefore, necessitated a critique of that ocular imagism commonly associated with a decontextualized reading of Williams’s wheelbarrow poem, among other sources. A non-ocular-centered poetry has emerged as a way of recovering the loss of language’s visual appearance and sonic, syntactic, dialogic, and idiologic potentialities. But I like to see a precursor for this in Williams’s 1930 poem “The Botticellian Trees.” Here Williams seems to explicitly reinstruct those who seem him as a naive ocular imagist, for what he sees in the crossing branches of bare winter boughs is not some primary unmediated sight of nature but letters, As and Bs. “The alphabet of /the trees.” It would also be a mistake, I think, to look at Williams’s visual arrangements of lines on the page as primarily a metrical or speech-scoring device. As Henry Sayre has persuasively argued in his book on the look of Williams’s poetry, we can best understand his

page design as a visual construction on the page.

In Johanna Drucker’s book art, meaning can never be understood independently of the complications of its visual manifestations on the page. She has visually troubled the transparency of letters giving way to contents so that you cannot help but see and be exhilarated by the many ways that letters and their sizes and shapes or ordering allow for, are a necessary prerequisite of, the aesthetic dimension of the verbal domain. Her books are exquisite but never precious; indeed her insistence on a virtually orchestrated funkiness I take as a way she distances herself from the traditions of fine letterpress printing that has generally idealized a self-canceling typography — one that you would never notice except perhaps to notice its finesse, its politesse, its gentility. Never crude, never self-conscious, the fine press’s version of invisible visibility has rules such as a “type should never call attention to itself” (type should be read but not seen) and “don’t mix types” (antimiscegenation). But it is only when the type itself starts to speak, when the dialogic or polyglot text also means a dialogue between fonts and papers, when intertextuality includes the material stuff of texts in its exchanges... that the Poetic will finally triumph over prosaicity.

Foregrounding the visual dimension of the verbal domain — sounds like some sort of tap dance number by a performance artist called The Wasted Apollinaires. The visibility of the text thwarts the New Critical-cum-deconstructive sense of the linguistic “idea” of the text: disrupting the idea of meaning as being hypermaterial (not hyper in the sense of overexcited, materiality — that would be more like Drucker’s intoxicating hyperletricity; hypermateriality as in beyond materiality). As such, renewed critical and hermeneutical attention to textual visibility is allied to the resurgence of bibliographic and socio-historical approaches in grounding poetry in its material and social contexts, in and of the world.

Susan Howe’s bibliographic scholarship on the works of Emily Dickinson is exemplary of just this necessary turn in literary studies. Her approach might be seen as a vital counterpoint to Paul De Man’s influential essay on disfiguring Shelley in terms of the opposite direction of its interpretation of a canonical English language poetic — toward displacement in De Man and emplacement — to use Williams’s word — in Howe.

Blake and Dickinson remain the two most intractable poets in the English-language tradition. Both refused the assimilative processes of publishing and distribution by creating works that defy easy entry into standard formats of reprinting and dissemination. Indeed, for the most part, we read Blake and Dickinson in visual translation or reproduction rather than in the original.

In “The Illogic of Sumptuary Values,” Howe has gone well beyond previous Dickinson critics and editors in insisting on the visual integrity of Dickinson’s manuscripts. She would have us read these works as much like drawings as like texts — a sensitivity to the significance of visual inscriptions that comes from Howe’s own work as a painter (which immediately preceded her earliest poems). There is a fortuitous symmetry between Howe’s discussion of Dickinson’s linguistic graphicity and Renee Hubert’s discussion of Antoni Tapiés’s quasiverbal inscribings. When Hubert notes that ‘lines, splashes, fragments, and incisions are

not to be taken at face value in their restrictions or limitations" and that "inscriptions finally reveal their kinship to scripture," it is as if she has taken on the same subjects as Howe. Indeed, couldn't Dickinson's practice be described in these words of Hubert's on Tapiès's ineffability: the painter — or poet — "has not only left lines, cleavages produced by invisible instruments or remnants resulting from unnamed occurrences, but also spots and strokes prolonging, so it would seem, defunct gestures?"

Howe's meticulously informed bibliographic scholarship creates a crisis for Dickinson publishing — a crisis that Dickinson's self-appointed literary executors do not seem ready to confront. Cover-up will not be an inappropriate description of future Dickinson editions that do not acknowledge Howe's interventions. Howe demonstrates that there is no substitution for the originals — that all Dickinson's readers will benefit from reading the photoreproductions of her manuscripts, and I include in that high school readers as well, since these issues ought to be addressed as early as poetry is studied. Yet if we accept that typographic transcription is inevitable and even valuable, then Howe's transcripts with radically different lineation and word-group endings than the Johnson versions — should be made available as soon as possible, not necessarily to replace, but to compete with, the Johnson transcriptions. If it is argued, contrawise, that some of us like these versions better because they conform to certain postwar lineation practices, that is hardly an argument against these alternative versions, which after all appear to better conform to Dickinson's manuscripts, but rather can be seen as an advantage of time — that more of us are able to see linguistic significance in what most of Dickinson's contemporaries, previous critics, and editors have been quick to discount as insignificant. Howe's transforming of invisible or putatively insignificant details into semantically dynamic articulations typifies the history of Dickinson's reception since her death well over a century ago.

In the New York art world at this time, the use of language is commonplace. Yet many visual artists seem hostile to or ignorant of the literary or poetic traditions that are relevant to their language use. There seems, perhaps, to be a conscious effort to avoid anything but the most banal or trivial language, as if poetic language would pollute or corrupt by intimations of literary complexity or literary affiliation. This no-writing writing seems to want to have the suggestion or titillation of language without taking responsibility for articulation. The language in such works suggests the linguistic anonymity of billboards or advertisements, though rarely with the twisting or torquing of such language as is found in some of the more inventive poems of the past 30 years. I exempt from this indictment such sophisticated, poetically conscious, language users as Lawrence Weiner, Arakawa and Gins, Nancy Spero, Rogelio Lopez Cuenca, Philip Guston and Clark Coolidge, or Robert Barry, as well as the conceptual interventions of Joseph Kosuth, whose neon signs replete with erasures are marvelously pointed.

My art world friends like to scold me when I go on this way: "Your problem is that you are reading the language; no one does that — just look at it." I admit it, then, I am out of my shallowness.

Jenny Holzer is one of the best installation artists of our time. I love, espe-

cially, the way she can and will ever too rarely speed up and slow down and blink and alternate the flow and direction of the words in her pieces: I'm always shocked how small a part that tends to play in her work overall. I enjoy being in dark gallery spaces with these fantastic illuminated linguistic totems. But when I start to read her repetitive and only half-intentionally trivial texts — such as "Abuse of Power Comes as No Surprise" "Myths Make Reality More Intelligible" or "Use the Dominant Culture to Change It More Quickly" — I wonder why she doesn't collaborate with a writer, or set already existing texts, say by Leslie Scalapino or Susan Howe or Kathy Acker, to lights. She's like a great composer who insists on writing her own libretto but only knows about one type of sentence structure and has never, apparently, read any other librettos. I'm amazed that writing that would be viewed in a literary context as largely derivative of quite interesting poetry of the 60s and 70s, can be either glossed over or praised to the extent that this work is. I find the situation demoralizing because it shows, finally, that there is no more care for words in the artworld context than there is in the media, and, Kruger and Holzer notwithstanding, I do not find the project of using the dominant culture to change it more quickly, to quote one of Holzer's bronze-plaque texts, anything other than giving up. Contrast Holzer's economy of capitulation with Coolidge's "The road to excess leads to one's *Own Forms*," especially as scrawled by Guston in one of the Guston-Coolidge collaborations recently exhibited.

Because of my unease with Holzer's language, I appreciate Henry Sayre's discussions of how her *Truisms* "disenfranchise" the audience by "atomizing it" — that they preclude response or exchange by talk AT the audience, not with it: for this is a precise description of Holzer's adoption of what Sayre, citing Mark Poster's new book, *The Mode of Information*, calls the "electronic mode of information." Sayre makes the useful observation that in her recent work Holzer is "moving back from the decentered, dispersed, unstable conditions" of not only her earlier work but also of the dominant form of electronic messaging. Yet it seems to me that it is precisely this sentimental regression in the new work that precipitates or accelerates what Sayre calls "a false sense of community, a simulacrum of community" by the imposition of the archly sentimental TV-news emotions of the chiselled upon coffins and "laments" motif that has a communicative style comparable to the truisms of national ceremonies at the Arlington cemetery replete with close-ups of weeping wives by graveside and the ambient sound of guns firing at slowed intervals to signify the gravity of the occasion.

Certainly Sayre's is one of the most interesting discussions of Holzer that I have heard and any future discussions of visible language will do well to consider the impact of electronic imaging. In that sense, Johanna Drucker's newest work, *Simulant Portrait*, her first computer-made work, with its investigations of what I keep thinking is sibilant but is really simulant female identity, would be interesting to think about in the frame Sayre provides.

That, though, brings to mind the question of simulant graphicity — that is, the representation of writing in electronic media (hypertext, videotext) — which is no doubt the most significant historical development in respect to this topic. It's striking that so much of the focus here has been on a rematerializing of the

graphic, a project even more valuable in the gas plasma light of electronic alphabet imaging . But this is a subject for a future empaneling, or is it empanelment?

... For now, I'll just have time to answer the question I mentioned a little bit ago about my first typographical experience. But then again, some experiences are just too personal to answer.

THE ABSENCE OF BODY/ THE FANTASY OF REPRESENTATION

AMELIA JONES

Years ago, my older brother had a best friend named "Body" who accompanied my brother wherever he went. Body was, however, anything but an actual body: he was my brother's fantasy friend, always there for him (yet always absent). I was jealous of this trusted companion, this absent/present pal who never let my brother down. While never embodied, Body, it seemed, was ubiquitous, almost an extension of my brother's own flesh. Body seemed more "real" than the fickle, transient friends (with actual, physical bodies) I called my own.

Fantasy, according to Freud, is the psychic transfer between the subjective and objective, between perception and consciousness, between the inner world of the subject and the exterior world. Fantasies are images and scenarios constructed through desire — "psychical realities"¹ that sublimate and represent on a "higher plane" the sordid, material, auto-erotic events shaping early childhood, precipitated themselves by the *loss* of the completeness ensured by the [m]other's body. Fantasy is that *process* which allows the subject to mediate between her/him self and the others that constitute the "external" world. The fantasized body of the other, comparatively, allows the fantasizing (en-vision-ing) subject to em-body him/her self as "real."²

In traditional — that is, Kantian — aesthetics, the art object is that which mediates between the making subject and the viewer/other in the exterior world:

The *operation* of the *mise en abyme* [of art] always occupies itself (activity, busy positing, mastery of the subject) with somewhere filling up, full of abyss, filling up the abyss/

'a third party' (*ein Drittes*) ensures the circulation, regulates the encirclement. The *Mitte*, third, element and milieu, watches over the entrance to the hermeneutic circle or the circle of speculative dialectic. Art plays this role. Every time philosophy determines art, masters it and encloses it in the history of meaning or in the ontological encyclopedia, it assigns it a job as a medium.³

One could argue, along these lines, that the Kantian aesthetic consists of fantasizing the art object as a kind of substitute *body* to fill the abyss of loss inevitable to the act of communicating a message sent, *dis*-embodied, out into the world. The art object is to stand in for the missing author/subject. *Like the (fantasy of the body itself,* the art object is a "bridge" that allows the subject to project him/herself into the world:

The analogy of the abyss and of the bridge over the abyss is an analogy which says that there must surely be an analogy between two absolutely heterogeneous worlds, a third term to cross the abyss, to heal over the gaping wound and to think the gap. In a word a *symbol*. The bridge is a symbol...⁴

And like the art object, the interpretive text acts both as bridge between the subject (in this case the interpreter) and the art object (in which the artist is embedded, through which the artist is communicated), and between the interpreter (as producer) and the world.⁵ The performance of aesthetic interpretation operates to fill the abyss/lack of subjectivity by endowing the interpreter with the empowering capacity for “subjective” judgment vis-a-vis the object. This “knowledge” allowed the interpreter supplies *pleasure*, a pleasure that “is purely subjective” — that produces the subject *as* em-bodied and pleasure-experiencing “individual.”⁶ Both art maker and art interpreter em-body themselves through the object.

What better way to ensure doubly the pleasure and empowerment of the making *and* viewing subjects than via, precisely, depictions of the very body that has been “lost” to that subject: the lost body of the (m)other — unveiled, putatively “present” to the anxious (male) spectator? The lost body — which must be refound through representation — in the psychoanalytic scenario is that of the mother:

The body to which representation refers is always, however specific the representation, the maternal body. But it is important to realize that the maternal body itself is already representation; the body figures the place of the Mother, the desire of the Mother, the status of the formative Other in relation to which subjectivities are initially outlined. . . . the whole theory of psychoanalysis functions as a study of representations. . . . a theory of substitutions and the forms (literally) of figuration. . . . Any image of a feminine body is thus a trace of a body (the mother’s), a memorial to it as lost. . . .⁷

Hence, Western painting has worked to construct (female) bodies and narratives of pleasure to fill in a corporealized history and fully “present” origin for mankind. Like my brother’s imaginary friend, Body, these bodies, also fantasized, keep the spectator company. They are trustworthy, passive, and entirely subordinate to the viewer’s masculine gaze. Or are they?

These bodies work — as *fantasy* — in the register of “psychical reality” to fill in for the abyss of non-meaning and loss that ruptures the subject’s desire for meaningful wholeness and the full pleasure of knowing. In Western painting, from the Renaissance through the modern period, bodies perform, interrelate to tell stories and to make meaning for the “humanist” subject. Painting represents the body as it functions socially and psychically (the body as that *Mitte* between the social and psychic): “treating the body as a memory, [societies] entrust to it in abbreviated and practical, i.e. mnemonic, form the fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of the culture.”⁸

The visual arts work to illustrate and make “real” the fantasy of the whole body. This is the fantasy that one is not split off from the (body of the m)other or rent from within but constituted as whole by a pre-existing “gaze,” in the Lacanian sense of a non-visual, subject-constituting other. Lacan differentiates the “look” of the subject (the subject’s actual “seeing” with the eye) from the “gaze,” a slippery term that has to do with the constitution of the subject in relation to her/his others. The fantasy of the whole body is a fantasy whose origins are located in the yawning abyss of loss at the subject’s absent core from which all drives ultimately derive their force: the gaze is “pre-existing,” it is “symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely the lack that constitutes castration anxiety.”⁹

Ironically — and painfully — however, this “wholeness” can only be represented in parts: for the nature of two-dimensional representation entails the cutting (*coupure*)¹⁰ of the thing from its environment and the flattening of its corporeality into the severely restricted domain of the painterly; the nature of sculpture requires the forcing of the body into the strictures of the Western sculptural form. To the represented form accrues another *cut* as well, for, as it is represented, the body is necessarily no longer present: “there is something whose absence can always be observed in a picture — which is not the case in perception” (where the perceiver is convinced of his/her own actuality and being there).¹¹ The absence of an actual body in representation mirrors the fundamental absence motivating the viewer’s frantic looking, his attempt to identify or transfer onto an ostensibly full creating presence as figured in a “fully rendered” body — to align his viewing “look” with the ostensibly omniscient “gaze”).¹²

Simultaneously, visual representation insists on maintaining an ostensibly mimetic relation to the world of “real” things (hence the famous story of Zeuxis and Parrhasios on the origins of painting¹³). The visual representation, particularly the painting, draws its legitimacy from the claim of mimesis; it is invested with the capability of reproducing visual data faithfully such that the image *makes present* the object or body as *re-presented* in its (meta)physical fullness. Paintings give the viewer the world and represent the viewer to her/himself. “How can one deny that nothing of the world appears to me except in my representations? . . . this *belong to me* aspect of representations [is]. . . so reminiscent of property.”¹⁴ The viewer exists in a continual erethistic state of desire in relation to the picture, which *traps* her/his desiring look.

Laura Mulvey’s influential model of “visual pleasure and narrative cinema” argues that the representation of the “whole” female body or its fetishized parts operates to reassure the male viewer of his uncastrated totality in relation to this prostrate, looked-at female object.¹⁵ Mulvey’s model pins the represented female body helplessly before a voyeuristically or scopophilically empowered, unambiguously *male* gaze. In contrast to this pessimistic scenario, here, cathecting from the Lacanian father, I will insist on the crucial role of male lack (the failure of the look to empower itself as the gaze) in motivating the construction of these structures of empowerment in visual representation and, most important, in determining their inevitable *failure*: “For it is in so far as all human desire is based on castration that the eye assumes its virulent, aggressive function. . . .”¹⁶ All subjects are lacking. All bodies are absent and/or in parts.

But, what *about* my brother’s friend? Incidentally, my brother used to get very upset if anyone made fun of him for “inventing” Body. Body was as real, corporeal, to him as those of us who are his own “flesh and blood.”

Remarkably, it was Alberti who first conjoined the terms of visual representation with the missing friend: “Painting contains a divine force which not only makes absent men present, as *friendship is said to do*, but moreover makes the dead seem almost alive.”¹⁷ Alberti is cognizant of and works to systematize the power of painting to produce “full” and “present” bodies, to create a history for mankind: “The greatest work of the painter is the *istoria*. Bodies are part of the *istoria*. . . .” The painter works to capture the *soul* through a clear and realistic rendition of the

human body: "The *istoria* will move the soul of the beholder when each man painted there clearly shows the movement of his own soul."

Painting is a fantasy to produce the absent friend, Body. Fantasy — like painting — promises to bridge the unbearable gap between ontology (the living body — heavy, full of pains and fatigue, smelly, recalcitrant) and the realm of human history and communication or representation (Alberti's ideal *istoria*). Alberti's systematic description of how the painter is to reproduce the visual field on a two dimensional plane via a set of geometrical, and humanistically-invested, rules has conditioned Western painting since 1435. Here is codified the system by which space is collapsed into a "cone of vision" constructed to fix the body in its purview, the system that works methodically to pin the body definitively in a claustrophobic, architectural trap of visibility.¹⁸ The conic vise is an ideological, historically, and culturally specific invention whose aim is to cover up the lack of castration through perspectival rules. As Alberti prescribes it and Lacan deconstructs it, the cone of vision is intended to provide the viewer with a coherent viewing point coincident with the original viewer's (the artist's) point of vision — telescoping two temporally and spatially distinct subjects into a unified, identificatory whole. As Alberti explains, "the distance and the position of the central ray are of greatest importance to the certainty of sight." As Lacan argues, this originating certainty is a myth that "assures us that we are in perception by means of the sense of reality that authenticates it."¹⁹ *Vision*, in Western aesthetics and philosophy, is endowed with the capacity for making the subject real, for giving the subject a *body* in relation to everything other — to produce Body as comforting companion.

* * *

How can an artist represent the *body* without forcing its conformity as a fantasized object, passive and fixed? How can history be written/painted through a different (relation to the) body? How can an artist break down the cone of vision to rearticulate the represented body in such a way as to undermine the systematic empowering of vision in traditional painting? What is at stake in producing a visual relation to the body that doesn't involve explicit figuration? What are the effects of implying or imprinting rather than depicting the body? How do these strategies implicate gender? — for, as Jacqueline Rose notes, "sexual difference, if you give it half a chance, will take over any subversion or mutation of visual space."²⁰

* * *

In the early 1950s, Marcel Duchamp introduced a set of "erotic objects" that reconstruct a relationship to the body, predicated its *absence*. As if respecting the taboo against the direct rendition of the female genitals in Western aesthetics, whose proponents prefer the smooth pubis of the Barbie Doll to the voracious hole of pornography's cunt, in *Female Fig Leaf* (1950) Duchamp represents the female genitalia in abstract form. Rather than molding the vagina anatomically, Duchamp presents a mold of the slit in reverse — as protruding sliver of "flesh." The slit molded here is from the spreaddled, doll-like female body of Duchamp's forcibly scopophilic machine, *Etant-donnes* (1946-66). This figure itself is without "lips": the vagina, carved inward as a jagged crevice, is marked only as transfer passageway between inside and out (as *Mitte*). In *Female Fig Leaf*, the female "absence" is made present — the crevice is molded in three-dimensional form.

The *Wedge of Chastity* (1954), a soft pink "V" of dental plastic blocked up with a hard metallic wedge, plugs the vaginal "hole." Inscribed to his new wife ("Pour Teeny/16 Jan 1954/Marcel"), the piece is a twisted paean to love; it is also a representation and parody of the blockage of the penile thrust by the supposedly intact hymen of the newly wed woman. The female body is metaphorized not as flow but blockage; the male body is encased, made immobile by the female.²¹

The third erotic object, *Objet Dard* (1951), constructs a relation between male and female bodies that inverts the usual oppositional genital structure subtending Freudian models of sexual difference. The flaccid penile form is the leftover scrap cut away from the breast of a maquette of the female figure in *Etant-donnes*. The penis loses its claim to being that ur form against which all other, particularly female, bodily parts are compared as lacking. The penis here is not only impotently limp, but defined in negative terms — as "not breast." Rather than ensuring phallic plenitude, *Objet Dard*'s penis represents the body in pieces — the body as lack.

With these erotic objects Duchamp constructs fetishistic genital organs to produce an overall incoherent fantasy of absent bodies. In other words, these objects subvert the *holistic* aim of traditional sculptural renditions of the body by refusing to be anything other than *partial* objects — here perverted even in their partial forms. These partial objects are the Lacanian *objet a* that represent yet forever fail to substitute for the objects lost in the subject's tragic original break from imaginary plenitude. These erotic objects *instantiate* rather than palliate loss. The *Objet Dard* (which figures the *objet a* within its very title), for example, is about the penis as *not* (as failure, itself "other"). Duchamp decentralizes the body, presenting that which is repressed in (yet provides the [absent] focal point for) the traditional Western representation of the body. The objects, as abstracted fragments of bodies, disallow the alignment of the desiring look with the subject-constituting gaze, illustrating the fundamental "split that occurs in the subject as a result of the encounter" with the other.²²

This insistence on the body as synecdochally rendered only through its most forbidden parts has its limitations — limitations that are made clear by reference to Duchamp's other multi-faceted figurations of bodies: as complex bi-gendered machines of intricate, mutual *flows* (the bride and bachelors of the *Large Glass*), or as explicitly molded in corporeal "fullness" (the ghastly pigskin body of the female figure in *Etant-donnes* with its implicated male "bachelor" voyeurs). In the larger-scale sexual projects, Duchamp expands his representation of the body to elaborate visual and physical metaphors that play out the *mutuality* of male/female desire in scenarios of seduction and sexual union.

Of course there are many other modernist and postmodernist male artists who have fragmented or imprinted the body to various ends. In doing so they may maintain the fantasy of the whole body (as compensated for by the fragmented fetish or the implied mold of a total form.) They may hope to align this fantasy with the material manifestation of the *Mitte* of visual representation, seducing subsequent viewers into collaborative restructurings of (female) sexed corporeality. Or, like Duchamp with his erotic objects, which refuse to unify into either simply male or simply female bodily entities, they may produce transgressive relations to the body. The paintings of David Salle, arrogant re-rehearsals of the female body as displayed across the painterly surface, fall entirely in the first categories listed above.

They restate the predictable voyeuristic scenarios of modernist paintings.

The painterly body parts of Philip Guston represent the body to more explicitly political and expressive ends. Like Salle, Guston draws on familiar codes to represent body parts. But Guston refuses the voyeuristic cliches Salle relies on, choosing instead to illustrate the literal fragmentation of the body of the other under repressive and threatening conditions. In *Pit* (1976), under a layer of earth with flames scouring its surface, piles of accumulated shoes and severed legs stand in for their annihilated owners, the torn and tortured bodies of the victims of unscrupulous power. In other works, bodies *become* white hooded masks: klansmen are eerily anonymous and power is exposed as a masquerade based on accoutrements adopted to present a facade of impenetrability.

While Guston's body parts seem to be predominantly male, they are male victims and thus "other" to a dominating system.²³ The literal breaking apart of the body of the "enemy" is a means to annihilate by cutting off, refusing the *flow* that is perceived to run out of control in the body of the (m)other — feared (fantasized) as dangerously unbounded and threatening to male order. Klaus Theweleit has examined the proto-Nazi fascist terror of the jew/woman/communist/other, arguing that it takes the explicit form of a fear of unstructured, uncontrollable *flow*.²⁴ This terror has its roots in the deepest level of psychical reality, where fantasy resides; it is founded in the original loss of the (m)other, the *objet a* (multiple parts believed retrospectively to have cohered as the "full" self). Guston's paintings, rather than reuniting the broken parts of the literally de-constructed body of the other — present the body in its dismantled horror, ineluctably giving the fragmentation its own terrible effect with a disconcertingly comedic edge. The desired eradication of the feared body of the other through fragmentation is subverted. Guston's hairy eyeballs, in particular, look back forthrightly at the world, though they are disembodied. They demonstrate the psychic dynamic Lacan describes with the scopic drive: the desire to cohere as a subject is projected through the eye, which functions as *objet a* itself. The eye pulled out of its contact with the body doubles the function of the desiring looking eye as symbol of lack, of the failure of the phallus to produce coherence around itself.²⁵

Duchamp and Guston produce bodies and body parts that intervene in the self-assured, mimetic pretensions of Western art's prescriptions for representing the human form. Because of the nature of subject/object relations in Western culture, the greatest tension in the Western aesthetic schema, however, exists for the female artist, who must negotiate with the regulations determining the female body as representation, the male subject as maker and looker. As Gayatri Spivak noted, women are "doubly displaced" in Western culture: women are fundamentally lacking, like men, but are also forced to be doubly distanced from our own subjectivity under patriarchy.²⁶ In Western culture women are made to bear the onus of lack and women's bodies to *figure* castration. Patriarchy works to convince women that we cannot be "subjects" even in the limited sense available to men.

Mary Kelly is acutely aware of this double displacement and its consequences for the female artist: "The woman artist sees her experience as a woman particularly in terms of the 'feminine position,' that is as the object of the look. But she must also account for the 'feeling' she experiences as the artist, occupying what

could be called the 'masculine position,' as subject of the look."²⁷ I would modify this to argue that women are not suddenly learning to be masculine, empowering ourselves with the "look," but that we are discovering that we have been "looking" all along. Women artists have appropriated the *confidence* that has allowed men to repress their inability to be aligned with the gaze such that they have the "balls" to produce fantasies of the body. Women are creating new fantasies by pretending to this empowerment of looking.

Lacan argues that painters — and he gives the example of two male artists, Hans Holbein and Goya — "have grasped [the] gaze as such in the mask. . . . The gaze I encounter . . . is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other."²⁸ He continues, after again differentiating the gaze from looking as such, to say "Is it not clear that the gaze intervenes here only in as much as it is not the annihilating subject, correlative of the world of objectivity, who feels himself surprised, but the subject sustaining himself in a function of desire?" What Lacan clarifies here is, precisely, the *failure* of the look to "annihilate" as the gaze. The gaze is about failed desire. This failure provides a gap — whose trope is the *mask* — into which the female artist can insert her work.

For Lacan, it is the painter (again, exclusively male in his examples) who recognizes his power to construct representations via specific conventions that draw on the desire of the viewing subject who imagines the gaze to constitute him as subject from the point of view of the other. The painter (re)creates the system of suspension by which the looking subject sustains himself in a dialectic of desire, forever working to align his look with this fantasy gaze. Through distorting, anamorphic masks — such as the skull in the foreground of Holbein's *The Ambassadors*²⁹ — that refuse this alignment, the painter "makes visible. . . the subject as annihilated. . . in the form that is, strictly speaking, the imaged embodiment of. . . castration." It is this knowledge/fear of castration that "centres the whole organization of the desires through the framework of the fundamental drives." The drives, that is, that would include the *scopic*.

These *masks* that painters know how to manipulate are also employed in the sexual relation. While we are seduced into thinking our castration is allayed by the "photo-graph"ing power of the "gaze that is outside," or the promise of wholeness in sexual union, we are shattered by the profound split within us in the same instant as intercourse: "the being breaks up, in an extraordinary way, between its being and its semblance, between itself and that paper tiger it shows to the other." This slippage instigates the exchange of masks between the being and her/his other. "It is no doubt through the mediation of masks that the masculine and feminine meet in the most acute, most intense way."³⁰ Gender — like identity in general — is created through masks. This understanding of sexual difference as socially and psychically constructed provides another gap in which the artist interested in de-constructing patriarchal fantasies of the body can operate.

Cindy Sherman's work plays most directly with the body as a mask: a mediating *screen* directing the gaze ("the screen re-establishes things, in their status as real").³¹ She reconstructs herself as embodied fantasy, second guessing the ostensibly empowered putatively male "gaze" by manipulating her own identity and projecting it as photographic screen. Her strategy is to re-present herself for/as

the other *before* engaging in the exchange. By fantasizing herself, in Kelly's terms, as "present," imaged body while she is also making body, she jumps the gap, equating the subject and object of representation. The art object *is* her, but her as screen; (gendered) identity is doubly marked as lack.

While Sherman directly interrogates Western art's obsession over the female body as fetish or envisioned "whole," like Duchamp, Louise Bourgeois plays with bigendered body fragments to preclude any relation to easily fixed, simply male or female identities. Earlier Janus pieces (1967-68) are suspended as both limp, horizontally hung penises, and pendulous breasts. *Spiral Woman* (1984) merges a twisted phallus with, or really *as*, the body of a woman — her legs hanging loosely, arms groping forward as if reaching for some lost genital projecting outward. While Donald Kuspit proclaims that in this piece woman "incorporate[s] the phallus,"³² I would argue, rather, that she does *not* become "woman as phallus," the other of man. *Spiral Woman*, the Janus pieces, and the breasted yet penis-endowed crouching *Nature Study* (1984) — all re-compose the body such that the female form maintains an uneasy relationship to the phallic form. The body of woman ambivalently takes in the phallus, using it yet only as appendage: *Spiral Woman*'s arms hover as if holding, and wanting to drop, her phallic body.³³

Bourgeois's 1989 series of works in marble confirm my position. Resting on chipped marble blocks, perfect spheres of flesh-like pink marble — suggesting male balls and female breasts simultaneously — are ruptured by protruding doll hands or feet. In *Untitled (with Hand)*, the pedestal underneath the ball with extended arm and hand is inscribed with the repeated text, "I love you." The base of *Untitled (with Foot)*, its anatomical converse, reads, "Do you love me?" "Love" is posited as a mutual and mutually constituting exchange — inevitably frustrated, uncertain, delayed (her use of marble, Bourgeois explains, is "about how I am unable to make myself loved. . . . It is easier to feel that people do not love you, so that you do not break down when they betray you. . . ."³⁴) The body parts are lost objects, and their corruption of the smooth "flesh" of the male/female spherical "bodies" demonstrates the loss at the core of male *and* female subjectivity — the loss that love and sexual relations are supposed to mitigate. The loss and helplessness of the sexed object is marked by the multiple, penile knobs of *Untitled (with Growth)*, which are forever frozen, as "growths" dependent on their marble base.

The penis is made lushly "present" in heroic, singular form in the large-scale paintings of Mira Schor — so much so that its lack is all the more evident. Schor's panel paintings of huge erect penises (the phallic shaft and head only, no balls) are rendered in delicate and visible painterly strokes. Schor's gestural technique, applied to the penis itself, mocks the traditional modernist alignment of *gesture* with the exuberant machismo of the Abstract Expressionists. By itself, the penis's pretensions to totality falls embarrassingly short: it is made to be a beautiful *object* and, as such, must relinquish its "potency" as icon of phallic plenitude. Made to stand on its own, the penis cannot maintain its identification with (as) power (its alignment with the phallus).

Attending to the penis in visual representation — indeed heroizing it, and making it, as Schor does in some of these pieces, perform various allegorical functions — simply and effectively explodes its assertion of self-containment and full-

ness of meaning. In *Audition* (1988), for example, a heroic, tumescent, flesh-colored penis extends out of one ear into another, a materialized trope of the spiritual "come" of god in the annunciation to the virgin. In several other pieces, such as *Patriotism — On the Blood of Women* (1989), the penis is doubled with the signs of phallic power — specifically the American flag. This painting reads as an illustration of the real stakes in global warfare (as epitomized by the current debacle in the Gulf). The flag is the come spurting out of the blood-red penis; through violent rape, this come ("America") inseminates the fleshy, bleeding ear (the receptacle, a metaphor of otherness). This alignment, again, powerfully demonstrates the *failure* of the penis to "be" power; it can only ever work to take on the accoutrements of power (such as the Stealth bomber), but will always fail to achieve secure domination by this appropriation, even as it kills and maims the other. Another Noriega, another Hussein — someone new will inevitably rise again out of the ranks of the other to challenge American "power" abroad.

Tall, taut, engorged — the penis simply cannot bear the weight of all that is assigned to it in the fantasy scenarios of patriarchy. By attending to the always veiled penis itself, forcing it to perform as *Mitte* (the image), Schor unveils its intrinsic failure to be anything but a mediumistic *mask* of lack parading as totalizing power. The penis as odalisque, embarrassingly disrobed for the look — framed and "well hung" for all to see — is made to take on itself the failure that, in patriarchy, is commonly assigned, reflexively and defensively, to the female body.

Like Duchamp, Bourgeois and Schor explore the body by metaphorizing it as genital form. The body is sexed, exterior, and fundamentally incomplete: sexuality here resides on/as the surface of the body. In order to take issue with traditional notions of sexual difference, these works all remain within the logic of Freud's castration scenario, where the woman is identified as lacking because, ostensibly, her organ cannot be *seen*.³⁵ While these artists all rework genitalia to force new relations of gender and body, other feminist artists have taken a different approach, producing fantasies of the body as dismantled from within.

For instance, Maureen Connor takes up the gauntlet of Duchampian practice, acknowledging the paternal power assigned to the Duchampian author-function under the sycophantic adoration of American postmodernism and dismantling this "paternity." In a 1989 series, Connor reconstructed Duchamp's "original" readymade, the *Bottlerack* of 1914. Connor's racks are no longer found objects that were mass-produced but sculptures meticulously recreated on commission. They are blown up to full human scale, their industrial "integrity" further corrupted by swathes of fabric and glass animal lungs "punctured" by their extended rods. No longer the exquisitely pure, functional cum aesthetic multiple, the rack is now forced to assume human proportions. Aggressively corporeal, the rack disallows the reassuring fantasy of the body of the other as smooth and yielding: its prongs are now menacing arms with hooked ends, hideous multiple erect penises groping outwards toward the viewer.

The racks pose as bodies — participating in the "theatricalizing" anthropomorphism identified by a horrified and threatened Michael Fried in the Minimalist object.³⁶ Like the Minimalist object, Connor's racks interpolate and menace the viewer simultaneously. Their identity as "body" relies on the desiring/anxiety-rid-

den "look" of a viewer who is made to experience the discomfort of relating to a life-sized object that threatens to shred the actual flesh if it were to be embraced as body. Finally, in *Penis* (1989), Connor inverts the rack's thrusting prongs, turning them inward and stretching pink gauze across the inside of this perverted rack. A gleaming lung rests on top. The (male) body has been turned inside out, its phalluses disempowered and its (feminized) pink innards revealed. Gender difference is subverted, and the body is turned inside out.

The minatory refusal of seduction of Connor's bottle racks is exacerbated by the gleaming, repellent, yet jewel-like lungs stuck on the prongs or, as in *Penis*, resting on top. The prongs pierce the lungs, which seem spongy and flesh-like but are actually impenetrable glass. Connor displays the inner body, which is generally refused as loose, horribly unformed, repulsive. The inner organs are reified and forced to intercourse with the corporealized metal racks. A kind of forced, spurious union has occurred — a copulative union that tells of the grotesquerie of the body, its disunity with itself.

A kind of apotheosis of the deconstructive refusal of aesthetic reifications of fantasies of the (whole) body can be found in the work of Kiki Smith: in a jar filled with water, an unfired ceramic hand decomposes (*Hand in Jar*, 1983); a delicate lace-like skeletal rubber body hangs loosely on the wall (*Black Madonna*, 1988); a series of bowls filled with ceramic organs serve up the inside body parts (male or female, they become the same) as delectable, if gargantuan, candies or munchies; a spare bronze form transmutes from the male genital system, exposing the dangling vas deferens as limply phallic as the bony penis itself, to fragile, organic plant (*Uro-Genital System [male]*, 1986); a bronze object, which looks to be a bronze instrument case, is opened on a hinge to reveal an inert lump ("baby") inside (*Womb [open]*, 1986). Smith's works obsess over the body: the body as decomposed, exposed; the body as loose parts and organs.

In an untitled work (1986), a series of bottles are arrayed in a neat row — each labelled with the name of a repulsive bodily fluid (mucus, pus, vomit, urine, etc.). Like Connor's aestheticization and display of the lungs, these bottles name what is essential for life but always occluded as messy, disgusting *flow*. As noted, Western art has traditionally taken up and represented the body — or parts of the body — but only as contained in conventionalized sculptural or painterly forms. Smith transgresses the taboo against admitting the repulsive, the uncontrollable. Unlike Manzoni's famous artist's shit, however, these fluids are not about the (male) artist leaving behind the turd as his creative legacy, his body encapsulated, as it were, in the turd, then contained and marketed as "art."³⁷ Smith's fluids are not claimed as valued repositories of her artistic self (bottled "as" Smith herself), but are presented as the life-flows that constitute the fantasized whole body yet must be hidden. They are asserted as apothecary elixirs, not as synecdoches for Smith in her bodily absence. These fluids are not the (present) body itself *per se*, but that which fills the "absent" spaces of our corporeal form; they are inevitably forgotten and/or repressed in the Western aestheticization of the body, which insists on the body as screen, as locus for the desiring look. The implication of fluids in the representation of the body exposes as false the painted body's claim to encapsulate the subject as object presented fully to a viewing subject's identificatory fantasy: "the pseudo-identifica-

tion, that exists between... the time of terminal arrest of the gesture and... the moment of seeing."³⁸

Smith's 1989 untitled sperm arrangement provides a fine denouement for this examination of the gendered body in representation. Scattered over the floor against a black background, dozens of six to eight inch glass sperm, marked by Smith's authorial fingerprints, parody and betray the paternal fantasy of insemination. The frozen sperm lie still as aesthetic forms. No flow here. No genetic capacity, except for the fingerprint marks of the female subject who formed them. She "in-semimates" and dis-semimates them — but as "art" — refusing their claim to biological potency. The woman artist, "present" in creation — brings us full circle with her glass sperm. No coherent, framed female body is produced on a canvas surface or molded in three-dimensional space. No masculine authority confirms itself as "disseminating" central and embodied creator of a fully intentional, coherent art object. The ideology of traditional aesthetics is figured and exposed by these gleaming "sperm" which "gaze" at the viewer in their multiplicity as she/he sees her/himself looking. These scattered projectiles metaphorize in physical form the failure of every subject to produce her/himself as coherent, viewing, em-bodied whole subject in relation to an other: "I am simply that punctiform being located at the geometrical point from which the perspective is grasped. No doubt, in the depths of my eye, the picture is painted. The picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am not in the picture."³⁹

* * *

In reminiscing about bodies/about Body, I realize with sudden shock that I never asked my brother whether Body was male or female. Body, for us, remains a genderless fantasy friend, the ur-fantasy of congenial/congenital otherness. The dream for fullness relies on a fantasy of no sexual difference: we can never be whole, this fantasy goes, if our difference is marked as lack by the other. Body is not a male or female body; Body is not other.

Notes

1. Victor Burgin writes, "Psychoanalysis reveals unconscious wishes — and the fantasies they engender — to be as immutable a force in our lives as any material circumstance. They do not, however, belong to material reality, but to what Freud termed 'psychical reality'. The space where they 'take place' — 'between perception and consciousness' — is not a material space. In so far, therefore, as Freud speaks of 'psychical reality', we are perhaps justified in speaking of 'psychical space'." In "Geometry and Abjection," manuscript from a paper delivered at the Musee national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou (May 1987), p. 13.
2. In their encyclopedia of psychoanalytic terms, J. Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis write that the subject imagines her/himself acting in the fantasy scenario: "The subject is invariably present in these scenes. . . . It is not an *object* that the subject imagines and aims at. . . . but rather a *sequence* in which the subject has his own part to play and in which permutations of roles and attributions are possible." By imagining her/himself as acting in a scenario, the subject "becomes" a person in relation to the other actors. In the "psychical reality" of the fantasy, the subject takes a role, gains identity as *protagonist*: the phantasy is an "(i)maginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfillment of a wish. . . ." and "Phantasy has the closest of links with desire. . . ." *The*

Language of Psycho-Analysis (1967), tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1973), pp. 315, 317-318. In another text, Laplanche and Pontalis describe Freud's notion of fantasy as follows: "these fantasies [of seduction] were intended to cover up the autoerotic activity of the first years of childhood, to embellish it, and raise it to a higher plane." In "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality" (1964), no translator given, reprinted in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), citations here pp. 8, 9, 29. They quote Freud from his "On the history of the psychoanalytic movement" (1914). For a negative view of, particularly, male fantasies of recuperating the body of the mother, see Susan Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 67-71.

3. Jacques Derrida, "Parergon," in *Truth in Painting* (1978), tr. Geoff Bennington, Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1987), p. 34.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
5. Derrida recognizes that *interpretation* (or, in Kant's terms, "aesthetic judgment"), acts also as a "bridge" instantiating the interpreter as subject: "This intermediary member which Kant names precisely *Mittelglied*, middle articulation, is judgment (*Urteil*). . . . Since the *Mittelglied* also forms the articulation of the theoretical and practical (in the Kantian sense), we are plunging into a place that is *neither* theoretical *nor* practical or else *both* theoretical *and* practical." This "edifying erection" of aesthetic philosophy is precisely the "*subjective rule*" by which the individual defines her/himself in relation to the art object: "this discourse on the beautiful and on art, because it remains at the stage of a theory of judgment, gets tangled up in the — derived — opposition of subject and object." *Ibid.* pp. 41, 42. See also Donald Preziosi on the conflation of the object with the artist in art interpretation; *Rethinking Art History: The Coy Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
6. On the pleasure of interpretation see Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, p. 46.
7. Griselda Pollock, "Missing Women: Rethinking Early Thoughts on Images of Women," *The Critical Image*, ed. Carol Squiers (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), p. 211.
8. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), pp. 95-95; cited in Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 88.
9. The gaze is what we feel "seeing" us, constituting us as "subjects" from without as we experience our lack in castration. The "look" is merely seeing, and reflects our lack as subjects: "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides." Lacan is explicit on this point — the gaze is not about vision (it is not the "look") but about *desire*: "If one does not stress the dialectic of desire one does not understand why the gaze of others should disorganize the field of perception. It is because the subject in question is not that of the reflexive consciousness, but that of desire. One thinks it is a question of the geometrical eye-point, whereas it is a question of a quite different eye — that which flies in the foreground of [Holbein's] *The Ambassadors*. . ." (an anamorphically rendered skull that refuses to be seen). From "The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze" (1964), and "Anamorphosis" (1964), *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1978), pp. 72-73, 89.
10. As Eugenie Lemoine-Luccioni argues in relation to the photograph, the cut of the photographed object from the real, the *coupure*, illustrates lack by acting out the fact that "man is holed whatever his sex," *La Robe* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), p. 25; my translation.
11. Lacan, "What is a Picture?" (1964), *Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 108.
12. Kaja Silverman rephrases Lacan's discussion in cinematic terms. For Silverman, it is particularly the male subject under patriarchy who works to align his look with the gaze. Drawing on Silverman's distinction I use the masculine gender pronoun here for the viewing subject. Silverman asserts: "Although the look of a character. . . may masquerade as the gaze for another character, that imposture is made possible only through the

propping of the look upon the gaze. . . . What has perhaps made it possible for film theory to collapse the male look into the gaze is the fact that in the Hollywood film the male subject generally strives to disburden himself of lack, and the look is the most typical conduit of this disburdening." In "Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look and Image," *Camera Obscura* 19 (January 1989), pp. 59-60.

13. Zeuxis and Parrhasios initiate a contest to see who can paint the most *real* painting. Zeuxis paints grapes that are so convincingly rendered that they attract birds, while Parrhasios triumphs by painting a veil on the wall that is "so lifelike that Zeuxis, turning towards him, said *Well, and now show us what you have painted behind it.*" This is Jacques Lacan's retelling of the tale in his article "The Line and the Light" (1964), *Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 103.
 14. Lacan, "Anamorphosis," (1964), p. 81. Lacan goes on to say, "When carried to the limit, the process of this meditation, of this reflecting reflection, goes so far as to reduce the subject apprehended by the Cartesian meditation to a power of annihilation." The subject thinks himself — through his vision — empowered in relation to the representation. Like the Cartesian who "thinks" himself into identity, the viewing subject envisions himself as subject.
 15. Laura Mulvey's famous definition of the viewed female body reads, in part, "The paradox of phallocentrism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world. An idea of woman stands as the linchpin to the system: it is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence, it is her desire to make good the lack that the phallus signifies." In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 14. In another, earlier article Mulvey writes: "For the fetishist, the sign itself becomes the source of fantasy. . . and in every case the sign is the sign of the phallus. It is man's narcissistic fear of losing his own phallus, his most precious possession, which causes shock at the sight of the female genitals and the subsequent fetishistic attempt to disguise or divert attention from them," in "Fears, Fantasies and the Male Unconscious or "You Don't Know What is Happening, Do You, Mr. Jones?" (1973), in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, pp. 10-11.
- Extending the argument cited in the note above, Kaja Silverman critiques Mulvey's original model for accepting the conflation of the look with the gaze: "Within the classic cinematic text, woman, object of the male look, functions as the site at which male insufficiency is deposited, a projection which is preliminary to those defenses against castration anxiety theorized by Laura Mulvey," in "Fassbinder and Lacan," p. 60.
16. Lacan, "What is a Picture?", p. 118.
 17. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting* (1435), tr. John R. Spencer in *Leon Battista Alberti/On Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale, 1966), p. 63; my emphasis.
 18. Burgin uses the term "cone of vision" to describe the metaphor subtending Mulvey's and subsequent theories of vision. This metaphor, Burgin argues, "is itself responsible for a reductive and simplistic equation of looking with objectification," in "Geometry and Abjection," p. 2. It should be clear that, while I agree with Burgin's criticism, I also — via Lacan — identify this metaphor as actually underlying Western representations of the body. In other words, as the above following statement indicates, I recognize this model of vision and representation as historically specific and ideological. Lacan's discussion of vision and representation is useful precisely because he demonstrates not only the limitations of a theory of subjectivity that relies solely on vision, but also the failures (deliberate in the case of Holbein) in the "cone of vision," or geometrical perspective as he calls it, that is intended to structure the visual image into a cohesively rendered body or system of forms.
 19. Alberti, *On Painting*, p. 48; Lacan, "The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze," p. 68.

20. "Sexuality and Vision: Some Questions," *Vision and Visuality*, Dia Art Foundation, Discussions in Contemporary Culture, n. 2, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), p. 120.
21. The notion of the female body as flow is common to French feminism, particularly the writings of Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray. See "Sorties," in Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman* (1975), tr. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 63-132; and "Volume - Fluidity," in Irigaray, *Speculum of The Other Woman* (1974), tr. Gillian C. Gill, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 227-240.
22. Lacan, "The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze," p. 69.
23. One could argue, in fact, that Guston's painterly romanticism tends to conflate all victims, all dis-embodiments. The dismembered bodies, for example, are transferred into the artist's realm in *Painter's Forms II* (1948), where the severed legs spew from an open mouth (the artist eating or disgorging body parts).
24. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vols. 1 and 2 (1977), tr. Stephen Conway, Erica Carter, and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
25. See Lacan, "What is a Picture?"
26. Gayatri Spivak, "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), esp. pp. 181-82.
27. Mary Kelly, "Desiring Images/Imaging Desire," *Wedge; Sexuality: Repositions*. n. 6 (1984), p. 5.
28. Lacan, "Anamorphosis," p. 84.
29. Or, I would argue, the firm stare of Olympia in Manet's painting.
30. Lacan, "What is a Picture," p. 107. Women, of course, have a special relationship to masks. This is emphasized in the debates over masquerade from Joan Riviere's "Womanliness as Masquerade" (1929; reprinted in *Formations of Fantasy*, pp. 35-44) to Mary Ann Doane's "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," in *Screen* 23, n. 3-4 (September/October 1982), pp. 74-87.
31. Lacan, "What is a Picture," p. 107.
32. Kuspit, "Louise Bourgeois: Where Angels Fear to Tread," *Artforum* 25, n. 7 (March 1987), p. 115.
33. For Bourgeois, this duality expresses the "polarity between the tenderness that I express and the violence that is inside me"; we could extrapolate that this is a tension between the feminine (tenderness) and masculine (violence). From Alain Kirili, "The Passion for Sculpture: A Conversation with Louise Bourgeois," *Arts Magazine* 63, n. 7 (March 1989), p. 75.
34. Cited in John Russell, "Touching all the Bases of Sculpture," *New York Times* (April 9, 1989), p. 35.
35. As Irigaray has described this draconian logic, "the little girl, the woman, supposedly has *nothing* you can see. She exposes, exhibits the possibility of a *nothing to see*. Or at any rate she shows nothing that is penis-shaped or could substitute for a penis. . . . Woman's castration is defined as her having nothing you can see, as her *having nothing*. . . . *Nothing to be seen is equivalent to having no thing. No being and no truth*," in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), tr. G.G. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 47, 48.
36. In "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* (June 1967), reprinted in *Minimalism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), pp. 116-147. Fried's hysterical rejection of minimalism's anthropomorphism exposes what is at stake in the patriarchal regulation of aesthetic representations of the body. The Minimalist object exhibits itself to the viewer, making him aware of his body in relation to it (Fried's viewer is always implicitly male). It is revealing to look at Fried's discussion of Courbet's paintings of nude women in comparison. For Fried, Courbet's female nudes are "absorptive" — allowing Fried as interpreter to penetrate them in identification with Courbet's original penetrating production of the female form. Thus, the "core" impulse of Courbet's enterprise was to "undo his own identification. . . by transporting himself into [his pictures] in the act of painting." (Unbelievably, Fried calls this enterprise "structurally feminine," and "feminist." One can only read this description as Fried's desperate attempt to jump on the currently fashionable bandwagon of claims for Courbet's "femininity.") Fried, "Courbet's 'Femininity,'" in *Courbet Reconsidered*, ed. Linda Nochlin and Sarah Faunce (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1988), p. 43. Unlike Courbet's "ravishing" female nudes, then, the Minimalist object aggressively refuses to *absorb* Fried; it refuses his identification with a making subject, forcing his awareness, rather, of his own critical "presence" before it.
37. These are the terms of Jacques Derrida who uses the trope of the "turd" to deconstruct the reliance of aesthetic theory on the notion of the object as containing the artist's bodily self: "What makes an oeuvre is the decisive decree, the separation of bodies, the secreting [*mise au secret*] of the turd. . . ." Derrida, "Cartouches, in *Truth in Painting* (1978), p. 204.
38. Lacan, "What is a Picture?" p. 117.
39. Lacan, "The Line and Light," p. 96.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE 80'S IMAGE

JOSEPH NECHVATAL

For painting, the theme of the 1980s might have been "The Return to the Recognizable," be it a return to the figure and recognizable imagery, or the return of abstract art. There was really no difference. To be both a magnificent ornament and a worldly success seems to me to have been the social and artistic ideal of the decade.

Two artists I observed at close range who have become exemplary of this return and subsequent collapse are Peter Nagy and Steven Parrino. Both began to utilize what I call the collapsing image around the same time, the mid to late 80s, and in the same place, New York's East Village.

The collapsing image is primarily characterized by an abundant display of lassitude, as if the elements which make up a painting are on the very brink of sleep. It is painting which concerns itself with an almost consumptive sublime, a stylish boredom, perhaps, and a slightly disturbing undercurrent of artistic languor. The very effort of Steven Parrino's paintings in presenting themselves seemed to exhaust them. The colored canvas, which makes them up, limply slides down its stretcher-bars into a folded, rather comical, relief. Likewise, it is interesting to follow the trajectory of Peter Nagy's images as they tumble down and fall together in his "Cancer" series. Nagy, here, conflates corporate logos into an obscure graphic overload, yielding them abstract. The result looks surprisingly similar to a cancerous cell vis-a-vis the black and white xerox process. In my opinion, a brilliant simile.

During this same time an inflated East Village "Scene" was just about ready to burst, to deflate, and finally to sleep. The collapsing images of Parrino and Nagy already start to display this peculiarly disequilibrium air. As inhabitants of this somewhat under patrolled, yet over lit terrain, their anti-expressionistic infotaining art seemed to sense the downward pressure.

The characteristic collapsing tendency which I am tracing here, along with its attendant socioeconomic parallel, starts becoming evident as Nagy's recognizable images and Parrino's structural supports begin falling in on themselves rather helplessly. Their volume seems inexorably dominated by some social gravitational pull, giving me the impression that these forms are in imminent danger of sinking into themselves. Such existential lassitude brought painting in line with the grotesquely exaggerated and thus cocoon-like aspect of the American economy. As the Savings and Loan scandal ballooned, as the military budget reached one trillion dollars, as the federal deficit skyrocketed, a hyped society reached maximum overload, maximum inflation, before the inevitable collapse. Exhausted materially, collapsing into itself by the sheer pressure of its own acquired weight, so overcome with dubiously accumulated exhaustion, and so little in control of its own structural

capacities — thus we find our art in parallel condition to our national economy.

The return of, and the subsequent collapse of the recognizable and familiar, helped to rationalize the actual situation with a feel-good comfortable mood, all the better to aestheticize the invalidism and stagnation underlying the structurally unsound 80s. The physical collapse of recognition came to be seen as expressive of our condition of blind and stupid overindulgence. Self-inflated, masturbatory, and imploded, these paintings are part of a social situation whose energy has apparently been sapped by excessive indulgence in self-stimulating pleasures. These paintings are the paintings of languor, of consumption, and of flaccid degeneration. Perhaps what we can see in them is the exploration of the autoerotic ramifications of decorous representation, the eros-sleep-death equation. Rather than appealing to our appreciation of painting, however, this variation bases itself on the general assumption of art's ability to satisfy its own physical desires, thus clearly removing the viewer from arousal, allowing him or her to once more enter into a voyeuristic, passive titillation — one within a soothing, undemanding context conducive to a state of restful detumescence.

This contemplation of exhaustion seems to offer to today's public greater ecstasies than those which could be expected as part of the work which brought our society to that condition. Take for example, the newer sex work by Jeff Koons, in which he transforms himself into what can only be called the Chagall of postmodernism. To look upon the pleasantly somnolent body of recognition, and to think back on the flood of reassuring images which made up the 80s, we can now see, I think, where overindulging in stolen historical pleasures leads. Conversely Nagy and Parrino, by placing the recognizable into crisis, and into a state of utter exhaustion, are trying to indicate to us that to be recognized is no longer an ideal.

What is important is not so much the particular form of their work, but the decision implied by the gesture that has chosen this form to the exclusion of all others. Something enigmatic subsists in the asceticism and the exaltation implied by their choices, their systematization, and above all, their decision to apply this impulse to painting. In this decision lies a tremendous investment of energy. And it is certainly from this intense concentration that the paintings in question draw their affirmative power, their peremptory presence. The energy of their decision to collapse their work is basically the only interesting thing there is to decode — this expenditure manifested in a painterly gesture of both brutality and pathetic fragility. What is fascinating is this impulse and the subdued echo (dispersed, embellished) that is produced. The tension. The precariousness. The determination saturating the inaugural gesture.

The exorbitant vacillation which takes place in these paintings, the mania behind their creation, becomes finally an affirmative sign, a sign of asceticism and ecstasy, and of style. They bring us back to the basic questions of why we make art and what is painting. What will decide the artistic merit of this or that object without this relevance? The ritual of the "painting exhibition?" For me it is the proximity to the intellectual substructure of a painting's time. It is not a matter of relegating the question of art to a sort of tiresome game of endless chess, but of establishing relevancy.

While throughout the last decade society has been haunted by a repudiated

fascination with tradition, Nagy and Perrino have, perhaps more than most painters of their generation, seen how much the moderateness of adhering to pictorial doctrine is inversely proportional to the ambitions of the intellectual stakes aimed at outlining our society. It is effectively a question of deciding to cut through the arrogance and submissions of an epoch, to cut to the roots of aesthetic and ethical illusion, through the phantasmagoria that was the 1980s.

Such a militant liberation of obliterated signifiers puts into question the overthrow of the specular structure, now so tired and sleepy it dreams of pictorial invention.

DAMAGED SPEECH. ON RECENT POLITICAL ART

ROBERT JENSEN

"Damaged Speech" describes the difficulty that contemporary artists encounter when they attempt to address clearly social and political issues all the while continuing to work within the modernist tradition. Artists like Hans Haacke, Jenny Holzer, Victor Burgin, and many others have attempted to reconcile political speech with the modernist, specifically formalist, idiom. (It will be one of this essay's assertions that there exists a strong formalist continuity between the practices of modernism and what commonly passes for socially critical "postmodernist" art.) Much of the political art that is being made today, especially in New York, has declared its ambition to overturn mythic speech. But its practices have themselves been compromised through the myth of the avant-garde which is closely tied to the marketplace. With the support of Marxist-informed theoretical discourses artists have attempted to adjust their form to suit their theory, in an effort to control both how the work is produced *and* — this is much trickier — how it is to be received.

The ambition to be both modernist and political, avant-garde but not commercial, both producer and principal critic of a work's meaning is not new. In 1935 Surrealist poet and theorist Andre Breton asked:

Is there, properly speaking, is there or is there not an art of the left capable of defending itself, and I mean by that one capable of justifying its 'advanced' technique by the very fact that it is in the service of a *leftist state of mind*? Is it vain to seek to discover a cause-and-effect relationship between this *state of mind* and this *technique*?

The realization of Breton's program remains even today very much in question. *A Breed Apart, Land Rover, South Africa* (1981), a typical work by Haacke, juxtaposes corporate advertising language with a photograph that refers to the English company's sales of military transport to the South African government. Haacke's piece asserts at once a political critique and a modernist idiom (even when that idiom is not readily apparent, disguised by the work's resemblance to advertising).

Political art like Haacke's is an art of apparent facts, or what Benjamin Buchloh has called "factographic" art.² The "counter-facts" presented by Haacke are used against the dominant myths of our society, to explode from the inside the language of advertising and political control. The claims made by critics like Buchloh for the political character and efficacy of the work of those media-oriented artists who are heirs to the conceptual art tradition (such as Martha Rosler, Burgin, Kruger, Holzer, or Haacke) — that they strive for the "factographic" in their art — do not necessarily reflect the artists' intentions. Yet, because it has been argued that these artists are capable of presenting indisputable statements concerning social reality, ostensibly unfiltered by artistic interests or even, in a sense, by ideolo-

gy, I feel justified in this context to allow the critics to speak for the artists. It is especially important to interrogate the claims of "factographic" art as a demythologizing speech now that it has become not only the "in" language of the New York avant-garde, but also the dominant one.³

Such art operates on the assumption that the traditional media of painting and sculpture are perhaps irrevocably impoverished, compromised by capitalism and the commodification of art. Its supporters argue that, in particular, pictorial realism as a means for political art has been bankrupt even since the 1930s, when realism became the universal language for the transmission of programmatic messages of political authority. Realist painting, whether by a Nazi painter or by Norman Rockwell, enters into the world of myth, of the representation of these individuals as if they were in a natural, essentially depoliticized state. Myth, as Roland Barthes observed, is a form of depoliticized speech, the presentation of the world as if it were naturally, as a matter of course, this way and no other. That is perhaps one reason why "factographic" art is so much concerned with language, and has, when pictorial at all, preferred photography. For photography has acquired its new, high culture cachet from its commonality with advertising — with the TV culture in which we live — the inverse, negating partner to the "culture industry." In sharp contrast to the "messy" media of painting or performance, photography lends itself to the demands of "deconstructive" reflections on the nature of media. Paradoxically, photography is also privileged for its claim to an inherent facticity. It appears to have a special kind of seemingly neutral speech (an "uncoded message" Barthes would say), but, of course, it is the same language exploited so well by advertising.

In the last twenty years Marxist social critique has been united with modernist practices, having at its locus media theory. Beginning with Marshall McLuhan's idea that "the medium is the message," — now much revised — what most informs and delineates current left-wing political discourse in the arts is the struggle over the nature of media and its operations. For many, avant-gardism has come to be identified with politically leftist, media-oriented work. This art has enjoyed in recent years a privileged status over other kinds of art, over neo-expressionism, feminist performance, and other artistic strategies not grounded in the conceptual art tradition. Such status is not necessarily conferred by high prices, although these too have come, but by the favorable criticism it has received from the leading theoretical art magazines like *October*; consequently, it is now coming to be supported by the leading museums in New York and elsewhere (witness the much criticized Whitney exhibition *Image World* and the Los Angeles Contemporary Art Museum's only slightly less impoverished *A Forest of Signs*).

So it is a Haacke-like sense of analytical detachment, a pretense to facticity and an ironic voice (e.g. Burgin), that pervades most politically avant-garde art today. This guarantees that such art will be recognized as suitably avant-garde, providing the straightest path to commercial and artistic recognition. The avant-garde is no longer an outsider's party; to an important degree, the Marxist-informed, radicalized 60s avant-garde has now become entrenched in the art world.

Many of these well-publicized forms of political art today have — unintentionally, but perhaps inevitably — played the avant-gardist game, what the Italian painter Francesco Clemente calls "the final picture," that is, an aesthetic "end-

game" that vies to cancel out all its predecessors. This may now be recognized as the bankrupt dream of the avant-garde. It is also a truism that the art world so often must first recognize the art as avant-garde before it will consider its politics. Such work, therefore, often conforms to the same cult of originality that many contemporary artists have sought to overthrow, but which survives because it remains the primary measurement of importance, that which gives a work legitimacy in New York and around the world.

Clearly the frame of reference for such a 'final picture' has strongly shifted since the days of Malevich's *Black Square* (1915). Abstraction has now been thoroughly repudiated as offering such a picture. The question is no longer what is represented or how, but an interrogation of representation itself; this is the new road that many follow toward the final picture.

Such art, if we are to believe Hal Foster, is "anti-aesthetic," following upon the "de-skilling of art" initiated by conceptual artists in the late 1960s.⁴ But, this apparent lack of aestheticism can, consciously or not, serve to hide the high art pretensions of artists like Haacke. Their work is held to be above the problem of commodification; they are said to resist social cooptation. Yet this high art tradition is as difficult to dispense with as the intrusion of commodification into our cultural life.

Since the 60s, inspired to a greater or lesser degree by Marxist criticism, there has arisen an art devoted precisely to resolving the dialectic between Breton's "state of mind" and "technique." By closely analyzing the relationship between one and the other the new political art purports to be within itself a representation of a de-mythologizing act. Artists who would possibly adhere to Marxist-informed social critique, while remaining modernists in sensibility, must be intensely self-conscious of their practice as artists and critical of every process of representation. They may depersonalize their work as much as possible in order to engage in the deconstruction of artistic practice, an attempt to strip away false ideologies and the master narratives of late-capitalist society.

To understand the prestige given to the cool, ironic, deconstructive mode of American political art, one has to see it as the direct heir to the two central legacies of the 60s, formalism and political activism, which have been tightly, yet awkwardly woven together. First, the 1960s have given us as an enduring model a most rigorous formalist artistic language, the product of the attempt by artists to reduce their means to the most pure of expressions. This was the language of the high art tradition sanctioned both by influential critics like Clement Greenberg and by the radical critical theory of the Frankfurt School, which saw high art — that is, avant-garde art — as a form of resistance to the leveling of society and culture by the conditions of capitalism. According to Greenberg, in order to overcome its absorption by mass culture, modernism had to seek constantly to purify itself, to seek exclusively that which belonged only to itself, so that it would be most resistant to the cooptations of the "culture industry." The value of abstract, objectified, and often ironically positioned modernist art rested for Greenberg precisely in its disavowal of social and political references. Art's very autonomy was its political critique.

The implicitly moralist tone of formalist purism was then turned on its head by the events of the 1960s and the postmodernist condition which they can be said

to have catalyzed. The social and political responsibilities and contexts for art were recovered from the dominance of the Greenbergian world view. However, the post-modern critique preserved the purifying impulse of modernism, the reductive grids, the "authority" of the ironic voice, the essentially abstract language of the modernist high art tradition that Greenberg so powerfully embodied. No matter how political, what makes a work "avant-garde" is its formalist aesthetics.

The repudiation of aesthetic autonomy was predicated on the recognition that the locations in which aesthetic experiences occur, such as the gallery, the museum, and even the home, were not socially neutral. Therefore, what was injected into the artistic situation in New York from 1968 was not only the anti-narrative and anti-representational sensibility of formalism, but also an evolving critique of art as a commodity object. Formalism survived the attempt by artists to avoid the "embourgeoisement" of their art by willing a different formal practice than what they perceive as the apolitical humanism of American high culture. By self-consciously employing a formal language thought to be inherently critical — which in turn would affect the way in which the content of their work was received by its audience — they would forestall any absorption of their art by what the German poet and Marxist theoretician, Hans Magnus Enzenberger, has called the "industrialization of the mind." They built into their work a certain indigestibility.

The tools that have been enlisted by radical theory in support of avant-garde political art are comparatively few: the principles of *montage* and *collage* — particularly as they were worked out by John Heartfield in his anti-fascist photomontages of the late 1920s and 30s. Therein seemingly arbitrary juxtapositions of elements throw new "deconstructive" light on the elements so ordered — the principle of de-mythologizing — an essentially literary practice that analyzes language in order to show the underlying assumptions in the text concerning relationships of power, authority, and so on. Now we have the right and the obligation to be critical of the claims to truth said to be embodied in montage. As propaganda, the willful influencing of political belief, their usefulness has been certified in practice by both the Left and the Right. Their "truthfulness," however, is simply an ideological pipedream.

An alternative strategy, which makes nothing but the lowest claims to "truthfulness" may be the most effective tool of artistic political critique (endlessly certified by political caricature): the principle of transgression elevated to radical practice. Transgression suggests the imposition of a "low" order of experience, low-life, the ribald, what is sexually repressed, and so on, on to the elevated discourses of art, or morality, rupturing the apparent seamlessness of "normal" bourgeois social life and values. To transgress is to strip away the veneer of the prevailing or comfortable view of the world with a dose of "real" reality. Such was the basic premise behind Dada, as in Francis Picabia's virulent mockery of the pretensions of the modernist high art tradition in his *Hommage à Cézanne* (1920), where the artist is presented as a stuffed monkey.

Transgressive art has always flourished outside the established institutions of art, in the first activities of Dada, in the Happenings and the psychedelia of the 1960s, in punk. But today, a far more sober (what I believe we may justifiably call a puritanical and rationalized) political art has prevailed. Artists like Haacke, Kruger, and Holzer employ montage and deconstructive literary techniques as analytical

tools, viewing art not as aesthetic — that is, in expressive, personal, and emotional terms — but as political and philosophical practice.

One can sense the continuing power and authority of this art today by considering the case of feminism. In the first wave of militant feminist art (as exemplified by Judy Chicago) feminism turned its back on the whole language of 60s formalism, seeing it as a perpetuation of the male-dominated art world. The "systems aesthetic" that was reflected in a wide range of the late 60s art — from conceptual art to the environmentalist positions of Robert Smithson — represented for many feminist artists a rationalization of experience that was inherently patriarchal. In its place, feminism sought to identify and construct an alternative aesthetics and a new politics. Feminism provided the strongest challenge yet to the canon of great artists, rejecting it as gender specific. The concept of the artist as hero and visionary, upon which the avant-garde was based, was viewed as phallocentric. It repudiated the cult of originality and the conception of modernism as a competition among artists over the final picture. Above it, it hoped to forge a new identity for women's art based on difference — to which Chicago gave the most famous, or infamous, realization as the vaginal imagery in the *Dinner Party*.

Chicago's solution to the feminist identity was basically representational, to find a visual metaphor or collection of metaphors that would stand for the "essential" female experience. Chicago and many other feminist artists tried to work out a typology of features, many drawn from the "low art" forms of the craft tradition, that would distinguish women's art from men's art. Feminist artists and critics also investigated autobiographical, intimate, emotional forms of art in which subjectivity dominates over the objective voice. For example, Suzanne Lacy — in a work called *She Would Would Fly* performed in 1977 — reacted to the brutal rape murders of numerous women by the so-called "Hillside Strangler," by employing as performers women who had been raped. The event consisted of three parts: a non-public sharing of experiences among the performers themselves, a written and pictorial documentation of the trauma of their rapes which was then hung inside a gallery, and the final public presentation of this work and the women themselves — naked, covered in blood, crouching over the doorway of the gallery. At the center of the room, hanging from the ceiling was the carcass of a lamb, with pseudo-wings attached. Such direct, expressive, personal and profoundly emotional statements typified feminist performance at that time.

Generally the art world reacted guardedly to such feminist work — both the style and the content were suspect. If the subjectivity and emotionalism of 70s feminism ran counter to the "objectivity" and rationalism of conceptual/media art, so too was essentialism rejected for being intellectually and politically naive. But as feminist artists sought to counter these objections and to abandon their earlier essentialist positions, many were led back again, like Kruger and Holzer, to the pseudo-scientific "objectivity," the neutrality, rationality, and spirit of research passed down from the conceptual (and minimalist) art tradition. Paradoxically, while some feminist artists realized through the investigation of the dominant male discourses that such metanarratives as Marxism can only be relatively true, the repudiation of the essentialist, autobiographical, and emotional figures of earlier feminist art has participated in the same "avant-gardist" model of an evolutionary, exclusionary ad-

vance of art, a new form of truth-telling that directly or inadvertently cancels out the efforts of its predecessors. For the more "politically" and "theoretically" correct feminist positions of today, feminist art of the essentialist 70s variety appears retrograde, if not reactionary.

In light of what has happened to feminist art, the principal question in contemporary political art today has now become what can be represented versus what cannot. The history of women's art has been the history of the marginal, as it exists on the borders of acceptable representation. Today, many of the women political artists who have become well-known, such as Kruger, have done so in part because they have adopted the model of (male) conceptual art. In Kruger's cool, photographic technique, where she plays with the ambiguity of the identifying "you" and "they," one sees how this form of political art accepts and perpetuates blenders on the possibilities for representation, blenders that are puritanical and formalist, even though they claim to be Marxist. They are anti-messy, anti-confused, anti-emotional, anti-sensual, anti-feeling. What can be said now is as exclusive of the varieties of art as the Greenbergian aesthetic ever was.

The critical and commercial success in the 80s of the cool, associative, work of artists like Haacke, Holzer, and Burgin — is an object lesson in the limitations of a built-in "indigestibility." Their art has been so self-consciously constrained about what it is possible to say and how to say it that their work often communicates very little. Inadvertently, such art may make a plea for the very "timelessness" that it has self-consciously repudiated. Already the avant-garde positions and placement of these artists' work means that they generally reach an audience either predisposed to agree with the political message, or willing to overlook the work's content for the sake of art, fashion, or whatever. It is hard to imagine anyone among her attentive audiences willing to identify themselves with the "you" or "they" of Kruger's discourse. Still the question remains as to whether such work informs one's engagement with the issues at hand more powerfully than do other alternative, non-artistic means. Attempts like Holzer's to get out of the gallery space and into the street have not necessarily led to a more powerful political statement nor entered any more into the public sphere than it would have done in the gallery. Distance, not engagement, is the function of her ironic tone. Her work is as comfortably placed in a museum as on the street.

In the last few years there have been significant efforts to overthrow the hegemonic rule of "deconstructive" political speech in the arts. The Jesse Helms' affair, the work done on behalf of AIDS research, the homeless, and other such causes, have galvanized all kinds of artists. This new sense of urgency and social consciousness among artists has attempted to get outside the concerns of both the New York avant-garde and the market. Much of this art, embodied by such artists as Sue Coe, represents transgressive, virulently satirical work that is *hot* compared to the *cool* aesthetic. It often falls within the tradition of political caricature that stems from Hogarth to Daumier to George Grosz — that is, outside the high art, and therefore, outside the avant-garde position. In Coe's case, the work is heatedly representational and overtly polemical, in sharp contrast to Haacke, who appears to wish to evade polemics for a kind of unquestioned facticity.

Moreover, such art is beginning to find new institutional legitimacy and pub-

lic standing as embodied by *The Decade Show*.⁵ A particularly moving testament to the expansion of political discourse may also be found in the current traveling exhibition curated by Lucy Lippard, *A Different War: Vietnam in Art*.⁶ Lippard brings together recent art with contemporary indictments of the war, embracing artists as diverse in means as Rosler, Robert Colescott, and William Wiley, all united by the common experience of moral outrage. The show opens up alternative histories of political art that since 1968 have been subordinated to the conceptualist tradition.

Aesthetic diversity and institutional legitimacy does not necessarily bring to an end the problem of political speech in modernist art nor overthrow the primacy of the marketplace. But I think we have come to gain at the beginning of the 90s an understanding that conformism may be found as much in "politically correct" art (just as in theoretical positions) as in that which it opposes. What Bertolt Brecht wrote in 1938 against the prevailing aesthetics of social realism is still applicable today: "Anyone who is not a victim of formalistic prejudice knows that the truth can be suppressed in many ways and must be expressed in many ways."⁷

Notes

1. Andre Breton, "Political Position of Surrealism," in *Manifestos of Surrealism*, trans. R. Seaver and H.R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), pp. 205-278, esp. 215.
2. Buchloh introduced the term in his essay "From Faktura to Factography," *October*, no. 30 (Fall 1984), pp. 82-119 and applied it in a positive sense to Haacke in the article "Hans Haacke: Memory and Instrumental Reason," *Art in America*, vol. 76 (February 1988), pp. 96-109. Note 13 to the latter article gives Buchloh's most straightforward definition: "'factography' can be defined as an art practice in which the facticity of given social, political, and economical circumstances were seen as complex and important enough to merit artistic representation; it assumed that the new masses of industrial societies would warrant new participatory forms of art production that directly related to their daily experiences and thus transcended the traditional class limitations imposed by the esoteric standards of advanced bourgeois visual culture. While factography certainly constitutes the epitome of instrumentalized cultural practice, it is wrong to conflate its ventures with 'mere' journalism. . . ." Buchloh does not tell us why this is a mistake. And he treats "factography" as a historical category, but it is a term he seems himself to have made up, and which appears as a synonym of the "anti-aesthetic." This definition seems not as meaty as its rhetoric. One quickly stumbles over his pretensions to "facticity" and "artistic representation" and "participatory forms of art production." What the "factographic" is, Buchloh never makes clear.
3. That at least some political and avant-garde artists do subscribe directly to the "facticity" of their art is confirmed by the example of Haacke, who in 1972 stated: "I do not want to practice agitation which appeals or accuses. I am satisfied if I can provoke a consciousness of a general context and mutual dependence by *facts* alone. *Facts* are probably stronger and often less comfortable than even the best intended opinions. In the past one defined symbolic signs for the processes of reality and thus transposed them for the most part onto an ideal level. By contrast I would like to make the *processes themselves* appear and I see my work in explicit contradiction to 'abstract' art." This text is quoted approvingly by Buchloh, 1988, note 13.
4. See Hal Foster's anthology of contemporary criticism and art theory, *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983) in which, not very convincingly, the new

tendencies in art are made to exemplify an anti-aestheticism. "De-skilling" is a term which is deceptively inaccurate and is used, characteristically, by Buchloh to describe "the entire generation of post-minimal and conceptual artists." See Buchloh, 1988, p. 101.

5. *The Decade Show* (New York: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, The New Museum, The Studio Museum, 1990).
6. Lucy R. Lippard, *A Different War: Vietnam in Art* (Seattle: Whatcom Museum of History and Art & The Real Comet Press, 1990).
7. Brecht, "Against Georg Lukacs," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, (London: New Left Books, 1980), pp. 68-85, esp. 83.

SPANISH HAARLEM

DARYL CHIN

In the summer of 1989, I attended two film events in Europe: the San Sebastian Film Festival in Spain, and Dutch Film Days in the Netherlands. These invitations came under the auspices of Wendy Liddell, the director of the International Film Circuit, a non-profit distribution organization which tours packages of foreign films to media centers, universities, and non-profit theaters throughout the United States. The problems of foreign film distribution in the United States have never been more acute, and how imperative for the film industries of other countries, I would discover during my trip.

Immediately, it should be stated that the two events were (seemingly) dichotomous: one was an international film festival, with films both in and out of competition from many countries; the other was a national film symposium, with films (supposedly) from one country. The reason for the qualification was that the definition of nationalism in film production at this time has become elusive. The Dutch Film Days is an annual event where all the productions sponsored by the Dutch film industry and the Dutch government are screened for film professionals, students, and press. This definition of "Dutch film" applies to any film with Dutch financing, so, in 1989, one "Dutch film" was Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover*, which was produced by Kees Kasander, who is Dutch. Though the San Sebastian Film Festival is an international festival, the emphasis is on films from what can be considered the Spanish diaspora, that is, Spanish-language films from Latin America as well as regional films from Spain in other dialects and languages such as Catalon and Basque.

Another aspect of these events was the increasing "international" renown of these national industries, and, for "international," read "American market." Pedro Almodovar's films, in particular, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, have been breakthroughs in the American art-house circuit; though Spanish films had been in general American distribution before, none had attained the box-office successes of the Almodovar films. Though the Dutch film industry stressed the importance of their artistic achievements, there was constant mention of Paul Verhoeven, whose *RoboCop* had proven that a Dutch director could make an American megahit.

Hanging over these events, casting a definite shadow over any discussion of national film industries, was 1992, the date when the economic systems of Western Europe would be unified. How this will affect film production was a cause for intense speculation.

The film industries of Europe always have been supported through governmental subsidy in one form or another. Though this has never supplanted the com-

mercial studio system, this has provided an alternative. During the 1960s, when American commentators were lamenting the fact that there were no American equivalents to Ingmar Bergman or Michelangelo Antonioni, there was a lack of recognition of the economic factors which allowed a Bergman or an Antonioni to work. In Sweden, for example, there was a film tax, so that 10% of all box-office revenues were given to a government fund, which was then turned over to the Swedish Film Institute for such purposes as film preservation, nonprofit film distribution (of films that did not find an outlet through the commercial distribution system), and film production subsidies. What this meant was that a film was not totally dependent on box-office performance to justify its production. Ingmar Bergman could create *Persona*, not needing to worry whether the film would be a box-office success. The government subsidies allowed for a margin of error, or, more importantly, a margin for experimentation. And governmental support remains important for such "marginalized" activities as regional film production, as in the case of films from the Basque region of Spain.

But how is a centralized European economic system going to handle the claims of national cinemas, regional cinemas, and noncommercial cinemas? How will decisions be made as to subsidies, grants, economic incentives? Here, again, the example of the American cinema loomed as a disturbing monolith. Should the European cinema simply capitulate and define itself totally as a commercial entity? This solution was, obviously, unacceptable to all concerned, but what solutions could be found to address all constituencies?

What already was known was that the subsidies provided by the centralized European film commission would be dependent on per capita production, and that national film industries had to prove their existence: for the Dutch film industry to receive funds, it had to prove that there were Dutch films. This was one of the reasons for the existence of Dutch Film Days. Over the past few months, articles in *The New York Times* described the panic that has been widespread throughout the Italian film industry. The Italian film industry, over the past decade, has allowed film production to decline, with the mainstay of Italian films being made for television or as coproductions. The Italian film industry has realized that, without a substantial record of film production over the past decade, their claim to receive subsidies from the centralized European film commission will be void. Over the past few years, in order to prove the existence of national cinemas, film production in the Scandinavian countries (not just Sweden, but Denmark, Norway, and especially, Finland), in Portugal, and in the Benelux countries (not just the Netherlands and Belgium, but also Luxembourg) has increased dramatically, with these films being represented at international festivals. In order to provide an "international" (again, read "American market") profile, the French film industry has tried to create a French film festival in the United States, the Sarasota Film Festival which has been in existence for two years.

If the dominance of the United States in terms of cinematic culture was not already assumed, going to San Sebastian and Utrecht (where the Dutch Film Days was held) would prove the case. At San Sebastian, the screenings for the films in the Official Section (films in competition or invited films which had not yet opened commercially in Europe) were held at the Victoria Eugenia, a magnificent old opera

house which had been built at the end of the 19th century. On the side of the Victoria Eugenia there was a huge wooden cut-out of Batman, which dwarfed the building. In Utrecht, aside from the theaters and "film-cafes" which were showing the Dutch productions, every movie theater was showing an American movie. Now, at least three-quarters of the movies shown in Europe are American movies. In terms of the box-office returns, American movies dominate the European market.

The sudden emergence of Spanish films on an international level (signalled by the films of Almodovar) has been the result of the greater freedom in Spanish culture in the post-Franco era. One of the signs of this greater freedom was the interest in films, in particular, American films. At this time, in all the major cities in Spain, there are any number of theaters devoted to revivals of American movies. This interest in American movies parallels the interest in American movies that occurred in France in the 1950s and in West Germany in the 1960s. The familiarity of young cineastes with the films of American commercial film directors such as Douglas Sirk, Samuel Fuller, and Nicholas Ray brought a different sense of narrative construction to the young French directors of the 1960s and the young German directors of the 1970s. In Spain, those younger directors whose works seem more accessible to international audiences (Almodovar, Rafael Moleon, Felipe Vega) display what can only be called an Americanized sensibility.

In the American context, the problem with Spanish films is the confusion of nationality. During the 1950s, for example, the most important Spanish director of that time, Luis Bunuel, worked in exile in Mexico. Many of the Spanish-language films which were distributed in the United States during the 1950s and the 1960s were from Latin America: Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela. Though there are claims that the United States is a classless (or class free) society, this is nonsense, especially in terms of the arts. Although the one market in terms of painting which remains lucrative at this time is Japan, the emphasis in terms of the commercial gallery system remains Europe. Europe, and more specifically, white people, remain the arbiters of taste, refinement, culture, while any nonwhite culture, even one as highly advanced as Japan, remains barbaric. While in Utrecht, Bethany Haye, the Paris correspondent for *The Hollywood Reporter*, mentioned that the information she has been receiving points to the fact that 50% of all foreign films with commercial distribution in the United States remain French films. The idea of French films as "culture" has been ingrained in the American market mentality since the 1930s, whereas Spanish films are mixed up with the idea of Spanish-language films from Latin America. The reason for the creation of the Sarasota Film Festival was precisely the desire on the part of the French film industry to maintain the sovereignty of French films within the American market. As a marketing strategy, that is the reason that Gerard Depardieu, currently the most active of the French movie stars, decided to make his English-language film debut with Peter Weir's *Green Card*.

Within the Hollywood system, although there is the claim of admiration for European films, there is a very definite hierarchy of acceptability. Since the Hollywood system controls the marketing of films in the United States, that hierarchy must be examined. For example: Scandinavian films are privileged. Though French films seem to have more clout in terms of visibility, Scandinavian films are granted greater respect in industry terms. If the Academy Awards are taken as any indica-

tion, Scandinavian films have been awarded "Best Foreign Film" nine out of ten times when they are nominated. This bias in relation to Scandinavian cinema may be traced back to the importance of Greta Garbo and Ingrid Bergman in Hollywood. If that fact seems facetious, so are most facts in Hollywood.

The incredulity of Hollywood would not be so important, if not for the fact that the cultural industry of the rest of the world seems to hinge on Hollywood. Meeting motion picture professionals in Spain and the Netherlands, the ambivalence of their relation to Hollywood is immediately apparent. The huge figure of Batman dwarfing the Victoria Eugenia was an apt metaphor for the relation of the American commercial cinema, not just to the cinema of other countries, but to their general culture. The Spanish film industry prides itself on its increasing internationalism, that is, on its increasing pop-orientation. The Dutch film industry prides itself on its adaptability to international standards, which translates into an assent to pop values. After attending these two film events, the position that the American film industry holds for international film production was clear; what was unclear was whether the American film industry understood any of the implications of its dominance. In the past few years, there has been a great deal of controversy when European governments (France, in particular) have tried to place trade limits on the amount of American products which can dominate their motion picture markets. American companies claimed this is an infringement on free trade, but do American companies do anything to stimulate the import of foreign films on American screens? The American studios hamper the distribution of foreign films by creating a marketing system in which exhibition is tied to studio release, where block-booking allows no flexibility in which films can get shown in most theaters in the United States.

For the Spanish and the Dutch filmmakers who are trying to make their own films, the fact that the American market is dominant means that, at some level, their films must make it to the American market. The most interesting young Spanish director (after Almodovar) is Felipe Vega. He has made two feature films, *Mientras haya luz* (1987) and *El Mejor de los Tiempos* (1989), which were both produced independently. These films reveal a Spanish culture that is being transformed by pop. In *El Mejor de los Tiempos*, the setting is a fruit-packing factory where pesticides and preservatives may be poisoning the workers. The young women who work in the plant are the type who would have been "peasants" in another time. But this is Spain after Franco and at the beginning of the 1990s, and these young women have become Americanized. They have VCRs and watch horror movies, they go to discos and listen to American dance music or American-influenced European pop, they dress according to the dictates of American tastes, with jeans and T-shirts predominating. When Almodovar's *Law of Desire* became (in American art-house terms) a critical and then a box-office success, this was front page news in Spain. The importance of American approval for European art remains contradictory: on the one hand, there is hostility towards what is (rightly) perceived as American cultural imperialism; on the other hand, there is pride when the American market proves amenable to the work.

Over the past few years, many foreign governments have set up cultural centers in the United States, in order to give their artists (painters, sculptors, musi-

cians, filmmakers) exposure in the American market. Those involved in the arts in the United States have looked to Europe for signs of enlightened arts patronage in the modern era: the living stipends that the Netherlands had paid its artists during the 1960s and 1970s; the great support shown to theater production in West Germany throughout the 1970s and 1980s (support which was crucial to the career of at least one American artist, Robert Wilson); the minority filmmaking workshops sponsored by Channel 4 in Great Britain, which were responsible for such films as *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Looking for Langston*. But many of these programs have been in disarray in the past decade, and the coming restructuring of the European economy in 1992 has caused great concern in regards to the cultural programs of the European community.

What the Spanish film industry and the Dutch film industry want is cultural exchange with the United States. They want the chance to have American audiences (even if only the small art-house audience) see Spanish and Dutch films, just as their audiences (on all levels) see American films. But this idea of simple parity is illusory, because the terms of culture have been in continual transformation since the advent of the media epoch. Whether or not these transformations are pinned to some idea of "America" (which is the characterization given by the French government), there can be no denial that the position of culture in Europe today is precarious, as the European community tries to develop an economy which might be termed "post-ideological." In this united European economy, which has not been defined in terms of "capitalism," "socialism," whatever, European artists will be faced with defining the place of culture within the economy, a situation which has been faced by American artists since the incursion of late capitalism in the 1920s. Prior to that, of course, art in the United States was defined by the enforcement of the class structure, with patronage for the arts developing from the wealthy. With the sudden need for economic justification which will come with the unified economy, how will the arts of Europe develop? This was the question one found being asked in San Sebastian and in Utrecht during the fall of 1989.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE SPECTACLE OF WOMEN: IMAGERY OF THE SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGN 1907-1914

by Lisa Tickner, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988

"All London comes out to see them, and those that see the amazing spectacle of two miles of women — women of every class, of every profession and calling — realize perfectly well that they represent a very great and widespread and irresistible demand." By the time Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence published her stirring account of this suffrage march of 1910 in *Votes for Women*, the British government had in fact been resisting women's "irresistible demand" for some fifty years. The question of votes for women, first raised in 1865 within the Langham Place Circle — a group of middle-class London women concerned with women's rights — was introduced to serious parliamentary debate in John Stuart Mill's speech in the House of Commons in May 1867 "On the Admission of Women to the Electoral Franchise." It was not until 1917, however, that a deputation from most of the principal suffrage organizations received an assurance from Prime Minister Lloyd George that a women's clause would be inserted in the next franchise bill to come before the Houses of Parliament. It was February of 1918 before the last of the great reform bills became law.

Between 1867 — when the first British women's suffrage committee was founded — and 1918 women by the thousands organized, marched, and demonstrated for the right to equal representation. In the process, they intervened in the public domain in new ways, refashioned social definitions and cultural codes of femininity and feminine behavior, and produced a series of thrilling visual spectacles that gave new form to the history of women's lives.

Lisa Tickner's *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-1914* is not the first history of the suffrage movement. American public television audiences will be familiar with one part of the campaign through the activities of Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, which were featured in the six-part BBC series "Shoulder to Shoulder," first shown in 1974. But it is Tickner, the noted English feminist art historian and Reader in the History of Art and Design at Middlesex Polytechnic, who offers the fullest account to date of the intersection of the two convergent practices which defined the Edwardian suffrage campaign: the political campaign, with its mobilization of female organizational skills; and the artists whose imagery shaped a new relationship between visual and political discourse. Tickner refuses the visual as historical document or illustration. Instead she addresses the matrix of complicated relations between power and representation that lay at the heart of the campaign, and the set of represen-

tational practices that ultimately challenged conventional distinctions between art/craft, production/representation, and art/propaganda.

The women's suffrage movement, which occurred throughout Great Britain but which mobilized most dramatically in the great marches which took place in London, drew together issues that bridge nineteenth-century reform campaigns and twentieth-century trade unionist demands for representation for women. The first and largest of the suffrage organizations was the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (the NUWSS) under the presidency of Millicent Fawcett from 1897. The second, the Women's Social and Political Union (the WSPU) was founded by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903. This was briefly the principal militant society; its split into two factions in 1907 led to the creation of the Women's Freedom League. Within the three organizations which dominated the campaign for the vote issues of geography, class, and political strategy positioned women in shifting alliances and relationships to collective goals.

Women designed, printed, and embroidered a wealth of visual political material. They taught each other the required skills from hand-printing to embroidery, and they mobilized women's traditionally feminine domestic skills such as needlework to provide an iconography of women's history, women's labor, and women's spirit. The visual spectacles that resulted were created primarily by the artists who in 1907 organized themselves into the Artists' Suffrage League and, two years later, the Suffrage Atelier.

The heart of Tickner's book lies in two long chapters on "Spectacle" and "Representation." This conceptualization allows her to situate the historical discussion within major areas of contemporary feminist theoretical discussion and critique. Thus her history, although recuperative at one level, also brilliantly frames and engages the psychoanalytic, linguistic, and ideological debates that underly recent attempts by feminist scholars to track issues of gender and sexual difference across the complex terrain of historical specificity and representational practice.

In "Spectacle," Tickner analyzes the nature of spectacle and its place in a mass mobilization of women. Drawing on letters, newspaper reports, film footage, photographs, and personal reminiscences, she reconstructs the major public demonstrations originally organized to prove to the government that sufficiently large numbers of women demanded the vote to warrant parliamentary approval. Founded on a politics of "seeing as believing," the demonstrations enabled women to lay claim to the streets and to the public spaces associated throughout the nineteenth century with the prostitute and the wayward woman and, with increasing confidence and boldness, to return the gazes of men which had traditionally controlled this public sphere.

Beginning with the so-called Mud March of February 9, 1907, and culminating in the National Union Women's Pilgrimages, which drew women from all over the United Kingdom to converge on London during July, 1913, banners, pennons, trophies, and garlands served to construct an iconography of "women's history," forge a sense of shared identity, and imbue it with political significance. As the long campaign proceeded — and as civil disobedience resulted in imprisonment, hunger strikes, and forced feeding — a more militant iconography of resis-

tance also emerged.

In the chapter called "Representation," Tickner's earlier discussions about suffrage history and imagery coalesce around the production of an image of womanliness that invited both identification (to suffragists and their supporters) and resistance (to the opposition). Tickner lays out the complexities and contradictions of women's struggle to lay claim to representation — to "speak" rather than to "Be spoken." At the heart of the battle for new representations of femininity lay the need to give new political and social content to the depiction of a recognizably "womanly" woman — that is, in Tickner's words, one identifiable by the traits through which femininity was conventionally secured. The diversity of the women who made up the suffragist cause precluded a single, all-encompassing image of femininity. The existence of a strong British tradition of popular and political illustration and cartooning provided ready stereotypes for anti-suffragist propaganda, among them the unsexed woman, the embittered spinster, and the hysterical. Thus suffragists were constantly engaged in representational struggles around ideal, normative, and deviant types of femininity. Tickner establishes a number of these types — the Working Woman, the Modern Woman, the Hysterical Woman, the Militant Woman, and the Womanly Woman — as major tropes. She negotiates this complicated territory with consummate skill: attentive to the ways that representations produce, circulate, and/or contest dominant social meanings; sensitive to the dangers of a reductive or essentialized femininity.

Suffrage imagery gradually transformed the deviant hysterical woman into its allegorical antidote, the Militant Woman. In the end, however, the suffragist Womanly Woman, like the emancipated Modern Woman, functioned as a sign remote from the realities of most women's lives. Yet in presenting themselves as the evolved embodiment of a new womanhood, suffragists mounted the most successful political mobilization of women in western history and gave twentieth-century women models for organization and representation that remain viable in 1991.

— Whitney Chadwick

PATTERNS OF DESIRE

by Joyce Kozloff, introduction by Linda Nochlin
Hudson Hills Press, New York, 1990, \$25, paper

These thirty-two watercolors by Joyce Kozloff are both an exhibition and a book. By that I mean to suggest that they function visually and conceptually in either context. Before I received a copy of the book I saw the exhibition at the Lorence Monk Gallery in New York City. It was one of those occasions when one ponders why such a *body* of work had not been done earlier. It was so positive in its statements, so filled with humor and delight. It was, in fact, irresistible. Having read fragmentary excerpts from French feminist texts by such authors as Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva, here and there, over the past few years, I was modestly pre-

pared for the kind of joyous frivolous challenge that Kozloff was offering. It was perhaps not so much a challenge — a word too closely associated with a phallogocentric insinuation — as it was a celebration, a kind of emptying out of various cultural strata in which mores and taboos had been so carefully embedded — indeed, encrusted — over the course of historical time. Kozloff's work was postmodernist to the extent that it was neither shy nor fearful of the terms of sexual liberation.

Patterns of Desire offers a view of sexual liberation that is both festive and deconstructive. Kozloff annotates her splendid watercolors with specific references as to the source of the imagery and the narrative, her own reflective insights, and puzzling speculations about their significance. The annotations are concerned with an art historical methodology as if to imply that even with erotica certain sources have to be cited and the references should be intact. This, among other qualities pertaining to the ecstatic suggestiveness contained in the imagery, contributes to the peculiar, yet clearly postmodern distance. The scholarliness of the book, which is due to art historian Linda Nochlin's introduction as well as to the annotations for each work, is not inappropriate but illuminating to the discourse. The book's format does not seem pretentious in trying to prove anything. The elegant design is appropriate to the content. Nochlin's essay is insightful in that it struggles with feminist ideas not as puritanical or self-righteous givens but as necessary tasks in meeting the historical difficulties that are so bound to the text, specifically the pornographic text, that makes up the images at hand.

The relationship between erotica and patterning is not illogical. There are clear historical precedents ranging from William Morris to the Punjab miniatures, from Islamic mihrabs to Japanese Ukiyo-E prints, from Nigerian carvings to Persian tapestries; that is to suggest — erotica is a kind of sublimation of patterning. The obsessive repetition of the pattern is a contemplative activity fueled by a considerable and sustained intensity, a particular form of human emotion, a steadiness of eye, mind, and hand that is quickly being extinguished in the high tech world of computers. This, of course, does not automatically follow. One could make the argument that computer graphics can allow this emotional intensity, this focus on the obsessive, overall image. Yet, with Kozloff's watercolors there seems to be another quality of revelation. It is the sort of revelation that convinces the viewer of its purpose and its unique tactile authority. To construct an overall pattern, free of its sublimation, is a wonderful idea. To indulge oneself in the speculation of erotica that opens the threshold of cultural and gender difference to fresh interpretations is the kind of distance that is needed in the practice of art today.

When Julia Kristeva writes of the necessity of *jouissance* in the context of the mind/body she is speaking of a quality of indifference that has been historically suppressed. This quality of pleasure in seeking out new visual delights which spark the pornographic imagination in a way that is neither stealthy nor insidious but is, in fact, gracious and illuminating, is a special mission. Yet without the dogmatic missions of empty scholarship and authoritarian cults, Joyce Kozloff represents what is truly religious in its most deeply secularized mode: that is, the visual delights of pleasure as art. *Patterns of Desire* is also about patterns of design: a welcome distance to the opening of a new discourse. Let's call it an achievement.

— Robert C. Morgan

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THE PINK GUITAR: WRITING AS FEMINIST PRACTICE

by Rachel Blau Du Plessis

Routledge, New York and London, 1990, \$12.95

What is under the rose exists in a secret and spoken commerce between a shared given and its potential resolutions. Its field is immediately charged with possibility and risk, deception, double-talk, affirmation, exclusion. In setting out to make a subject of what is hidden, in examining the state of what is taken down, *The Pink Guitar* makes explicit the crises of and between artistic and critical production. In the process it takes on the cultural suppression of intimate and ungrammatical fact, the struggle between a writing body and the foregoing corpus to which a writer or artist is indebted, by which s/he is soothed or assaulted.

Within this idyll of an argument, Du Plessis takes a peep (her own term) at the violence half-hidden half-revealed within acts of representation and argues for greater gender-vigilance among art-workers. As a re-figuring through regendering of Wallace Stevens's ("Man with the] Blue Guitar," this pinked (stabbed, shot, lashed, rosed-up) instrument is complicated by the theoretical position of Woman as *being* rather than being *with* the played-upon vehicle of "things as they are." Like Du Plessis's earlier *tabula raza* made *rosa*, her *Pink Guitar* insists on an irreducible space of specular resemblance, of individual and collective memory. What has to do with writing has to do with me if I am a writer. Or, to engage in any practice of art is to remember and inherit that which has already transpired within it even when it perpetrates a violence against me.

Half-titled "Writing as Feminist Practice," the book's clearest aim is a leveling out of the hierarchies of language use which develop at the moment when words become discourse. Here argument is spliced with interjections and anecdotes, re-edited cast-offs of earlier drafts ("Once I ate pate de grieve. . . I would not do that again"). It progresses in rough sequence through: 1) a musing on a fragmented, possibly idyllic history blotted out by disaster and conquerings ("For the Etruscans"), 2) some sympathetic though critical looks at the problematic position of women in 20th-century male modernist and avant-garde representations ("Pater-daughter," largely on Williams, and "Sub Rosa" on Duchamp), 3) an extended *nota bene* on the possible subversions of traditional writing practice by contemporary women writers (essays on Beverly Dahlen and Susan Howe), and 4) the statement and justification of an individual aesthetic of "rupturing poetry" ("Language Acquisition," "Otherhow," "The Pink Guitar").

But the title's writing and practice refer less to the works Du Plessis discusses than they do to the workings of the collection itself which acts as a ground of practice, propelled by editorial rappings of internal and external voices, meanderings and interruptions, the 'poetry of essay' described as "galloping and gulping, hybristic, subversive."

It is to the always already conflicted position of a woman writing that Du Plessis (revisionary, leaping) repeatedly returns.

This is the central struggle of the woman writer. For every word, each cadence, each posture, the tone, the range of voices, the nature of plot, the

rhythm of structures, the things that happen, events excluded, reasons for writing, the ways she's impeded, the noises around her, vocabularies of feeling, scripts of behavior, choices of wisdom, voices inside her, body divided, image of wonder.

All must be re-made.

In the process of this remaking, the universalized "woman writer" walks a mine field of imaginative and worldly risk reminiscent of H.D.'s childhood sense that if she were to step on the wrong stone she would disappear. Yet with the entrance of an artist's "gift" into the world, in her entrancement with imaginative making, s/he discovers a company of other others, benevolent but/and/or dangerous progenitors, guides and guardians, operators and transgressors.

If the generative question here is, as I suspect, that of the H.D. essay, "What gift does the gifted return to these givers?" Du Plessis's most compelling response is the weaving of exchange, argument, and inheritance in her work on Duchamp's *Givens*, or *Etant Donnes*. An installation at the Philadelphia Museum, the *Etant Donnes: 1e la chute d'eau, 2e le gaz d'éclairage* consists of a rustic door through which, by pressing against a gap in the wood, a spectator might see in the midst of an unnaturally natural panorama the waxy pink body of a woman "stripped bare" against twigs, her "cunt" or a distorted, estranged version of "cunt" in direct and central view. In her/its oversized hand, a gas lamp. In the background a tiny waterfall. Under the rose, as under the ruse of his cross-dressing pseudonymous self Rrose Selavy, Duchamp's installation compels silence and fascination, a perverse complicity between eye and object. But not without the authorial R-rose, eros, *the Rose* with its monumental given-name capital coming to ruthless odds with the obverse under-side of the inherited name (C'est-la-vie!) capable of remaining unruffled by incidental violence. "Sub Rosa," Du Plessis's essay compels a return to that which both can and cannot be seen, a pink and wounded? desired? disrupted? body, and the strange tenderness of a seeing subject towards its wounded? desired? displaced? other self, at conscious odds with a tradition *among* which it is itself in a condition of desire and debt, a "marked marker."

DuPlessis on "male modernists":

I read them dazzled, Pound, Williams, Eliot. They "read" me. Some me, anyway. I am, within their words, dug into habitual gender sites, repositioned from producer to produced, from writer to written, from artist to inspiration. Or to blockage.

The Pink Guitar both addresses that blockage and celebrates the possibilities of passage beyond it. The essays on Dahlen and Howe, while circumscribed by "feminist practice," exemplify the range of homage that can be paid to non-canonical work without engaging in the canonizing discourse of academic criticism.

Further, it minds the difficulties of artistic practice itself, the necessary onwardness (Robert Creeley's term) of the practitioner in sustaining a work informed by but not reducible to an ideology.

If Du Plessis's vision of feminist writing practice verges at some point on the utopian or prescriptive, its rose colored glasses roam usefully between the specular and spectacular, a reminder of subjective culpability and an incitement to watchfulness. *So what did you see?* (Lyotard on Duchamp) *Something to see with.*

— Elizabeth Willis

THE NEW CONCEPT OF ART AND POPULAR CULTURE IN NICARAGUA SINCE THE REVOLUTION IN 1979

by David Craven

Latin American Studies, Volume I

The Edwin Mellon Press, Lewiston, New York, 1989, \$85

What makes this study a timely and important one is the revelatory aspect of the author's research combined with its straightforward delivery. David Craven is the Chairman of the Art History Department at SUNY Cortland. His training and methodology are within the realm of art history; yet, here, he has tackled the immense problem of combining art criticality with political, social, economic, religious, and cultural issues.

This study tells the tale of a major cultural revolution in which the New Person (*Persona Nueva*) emerges from the shadows of capitalist exploitation and human oppression. It is the story of a bold vision: the democratization of art and how Nicaragua came to terms with the process of cultural empowerment and artistic self-realization. Craven analyzes the manner in which the Sandinistas came to power in 1979 in order to transform the conditions of life by way of cultural enrichment. According to Craven, the Sandinistas were attempting to avoid the populist idealization of the past and to work through a systematic framework without adhering to a closed system. He describes a "new synthesis" in terms of art and culture. For the Sandinista's Minister of Culture, Father Ernesto Cardenal, one of the major poetic voices of the revolution, it is a matter of "artistic participation in social transformation." Cardenal sees no contradiction between Marxism and liberation theology; that is, putting the material necessities of life at the forefront of one's ecclesiastical responsibility in order to mitigate human misery. For Cardenal, "culture is the revolution, and the revolution is culture," there is no separation. Based on the dialogical techniques of the Brazilian educator Paolo Freire, the Sandinistas aspired to break down the absurd dichotomies which had, until then, always involved a decision-making hierarchy to which the people responded.

Dialogue is the essence of education in its quest for literacy and intelligence, therefore, it is the most necessary ingredient for the revolution. Without dialogue there can be no real social progression. Using the dialogical method, Freire aspires "to realize every human's ontological vocation to be a subject." In so doing, Freire believes that "cultural progression must be premised on a struggle which delimits the lives of the popular classes." It is no wonder, as Craven points out, that immediately following the entry of the Sandinistas on July 20, 1979, a literary crusade was implemented. It was, perhaps, this concern for literacy and education, inspired by the writings of Freire and Cardenal, that inspired Nicaraguan Ex-President Daniel Ortega to proclaim in one of his early speeches: "In Nicaragua everyone is a poet until they prove otherwise. . . ."

Father Cardenal has stated in an interview with Craven and John Ryder in 1983, published as an appendix to the book, that:

All of the social changes of our country constitute the new culture of Nicaragua. The renaissance that is taking place in all these areas, the great interest in our entire culture, is based on our folklore, our traditions, our national

foods and drinks, our publications, our paintings, our poetry, our crafts, and our Nicaraguan cinema, which we are finally able to realize. All this is the cultural transformation engendered by the revolution.

Craven also discusses the revival of Pre-Columbian art forms, including drama and the more popular cultural forms known as Gueguence. These revivals of indigenous art forms came as a kind of restoration of the codes suppressed under the brutal dictatorship of Somoza. His descriptions of Somoza's regime include the dictator's pollution of the environment, his atrocious human rights record, his exploitation of the *campesinos* (or peasant farmworkers), and his endorsement of primitive-style painting as long as it functioned as a national commodity for tourism. It seems that Nicaraguan culture was close to extinction, if not in shackles, prior to the advent of the Sandinistas and that there was a certain genius inherent within the revolution that gave way to a model for a cooperative lifestyle, with the arts at the core of its expression, which the Reagan administration found difficult to tolerate. If we are to believe Craven's analysis that the Sandinistas employed a Marxist approach to government without endorsing a Marxist world view, then it would make sense to consider that the reactionary encounter between Nicaragua and the Reagan-backed contras was a mindlessly horrific war based largely on ideological misunderstanding. Nonetheless, it would be naive to assume that the Sandinistas' cultural model was without material consequences. Any retreat from western exploitation towards a search for a more indigenous means of production and autonomous trade has to result in some form of conflict. The writer Thomas Borge, for example, advocated that it was time for the spectator to become the producer, and that for the *Persona Nueva* to emerge a new culture must be defined.

Given Craven's training in art history and his remarkable gift for dialectical criticism, it is no surprise that the fourth chapter, "Art in the Streets," is one of the most spirited and original in terms of its research. Here, Craven analyzes the various forms of "street art" in Managua, including billboards, graffiti, *pintas* (roughly drawn or painted pictures), posters, and primarily, of course, the murals. Craven attempts to clarify the critical and dialectical uses of these media within the context of a "heterodox position" as he witnessed it being practiced by the Sandinista artists during his stay in Managua in 1986. Theoretically, Craven sees the Brechtian model of constructing an open interpretation of meaning as necessary to the way in which images and texts appeared in the street. He contrasts the murals, for example, with the style of socialist realism by alluding to the fact that, within the art of the Sandinistas, the compositions appear to "remain fundamentally non-hierarchical spatially."

Craven's description and interpretation of the large murals in Velasquez Park is both formal and deconstructive, yet he rarely misses an opportunity to elucidate certain comparisons with contemporary western art. In a discussion of the works of Alejandro Canales, Manuel Garcia, and Leonel Cerrato, he emphasizes how their works symbolically carry the spirit of liberation, yet in non-oppressive terms. He characterizes most socialist realist portraits as focusing on "the unchanging role of the personality cult," whereas these murals are more inclined towards transformation through "the superb use of flat graphic design that pervades the composition as a whole." It is the composition, not simply the image, that reveals

the sophisticated and enlightened formal attributes of these artists. One of his best descriptions is of the mural of the three founders of the Sandinistas — Augusto Sandino, Carlos Fonseca, and Rigoberto Lopez Perez — by the artist Alejandro Canales:

What is impressive, then, about the usage of these portraits in the Telcor mural is not so much what these leitmotifs have generally come to signify because of the billboard paintings . . . but rather how Canales has formally integrated these portraits into the murals. Placed on a diagonal and decentering line that points to other interrelated themes, these figures have become part of a dynamic interchange of various elements in a Cubist grid. Hence, these elements are at odds with the static character of most large-scale portraits . . . which by centering the work strongly often undermine the sense of process. Here, the evocation of a sense of transformation is a distinctive feature of the superb use of flat graphic design that pervades the composition as a whole.

Craven cites Roland Barthes whose discussion of writerly and readerly texts seems to have some correlation with the open-endedness by which muralists, such as Canales and Garcia, and oil painters, such as Maria Gallo, approach their art. In either case there is the open interpretation within a given ideological construct. Craven also discusses the work of a brilliant collage artist, Raul Quintanilla, who works in a manner not unrelated to the Dada artist John Heartfield or the more recent conceptualist Hans Haacke.

One cannot leave this book unconvinced of the originality and timeliness of the Sandinista experiment in the arts and its transformative cultural aspirations. It is an important statement on the growing need for a more democratized art that would really connect with people on an everyday level of necessity.

With the election of former newspaper editor, Violetta Chamorro, in February 1990, the Sandinista government could no longer support the massive cultural revolution which had transpired during the hey-day of their popularity in Nicaragua. Tragically, yet predictably, the new Chamorro regime almost immediately began their exercises in iconoclasm by ordering the whitewashing of some of the major murals painted under the Sandinistas. Such murals as *El Suenode de Bolivar* and *Mural de la Mujer* are but two of the large-scale public works in Managua that have been destroyed. Yet the spirit of these murals has uplifted an entire generation. The visual expressions of justice, equality, and freedom that have been embedded in the historical conscience of the Nicaraguan people has been removed for the time being. Even before the election of Chamorro the cultural revolution was thwarted by the economic disasters of war and national defense. The effect of this experiment in populist art by the people and for the people has yet to be known.

— Robert C. Morgan

Letter

On Good Girls, Bad Girls, and Bad Boys

Why go for second best baby?
Put your love to the test.
Make him express how he feels and
Only then you'll know your love is real.

Smack in the middle of my very own "bad girl" crisis, I find the whole world suddenly in the midst of debating those old categories: "good girls" vs. "bad girls." As a woman artist who is also a daughter, wife, and mother, I find myself in a surprisingly "bad girl" state of mind. Terribly empowering, it is; I have granted myself permission to rebel and act out within the studio, independent of the roles I must negotiate outside the studio.

Yet, in the past month, it also sounds awfully silly and solipsistic. Perhaps, the interview with Madonna on *Nightline* was a turning point. She sounded awfully silly and solipsistic. The right to sell yourself as a sex object has always been available to women. The limits of this transaction have been thoroughly explored by feminists since the 19th century. I find myself wondering why this is such a potent claim at this time and why feminist artists are re-evaluating our position on this issue.

My starting point is Corinne Robins' article "Why We Need 'Bad Girls' Rather than 'Good' Ones!" in *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* #8. Robins puts forth a definition of a "bad girl artist" for which I am totally supportive, that is, "artists who make their own rules." "Bad girl," however, implies more than flaunting the rules. Being a bad girl has rules of its own. If I remember correctly, bad girls in my high school were not simply rebellious students. They were the girls who experimented with danger by acting as if they were sexually experienced. Specific items of clothing (tight jeans, leather jackets, high heel shoes), very specific make-up (red lipstick, not frosted), and shag haircuts (like Jane Fonda in *Klute*) all made up the bad girl persona. Also, we must not forget this key characteristic — they hung out with bad boys.

In Robins' article, Mary Kelly is set up as the opposition to "bad girl" artists. Kelly is described as a "good girl" feminist ("ladies speaking among themselves") because her work "addresses itself to women's loss of power in the only area men have ever willingly granted her power." Though I am not a fan of Kelly, primarily due to my own bias against work accessible only to highly literate audiences, this distinction is without meaning. There seems little difference in using "sexiness" or using loss of "sexiness" as one's subject matter. Both focus on the female form as totem and both sometimes inadvertently function to re-emphasize this quality. The key problem with Kelly as interpreted by Robins is her focus on the "personal," i.e., only of interest to other women; or to use the vernacular, Kelly doesn't hang out with bad boys.

Exploring female sexual experience has unquestionably served an important role in feminist art. And knowing this subject matter is available to me is liberating

as an artist. But, there is something in the label "bad girl" that is even more "seductive" than mere access to sexual material. It carries with it access to men, the marketplace, and the tradition of genius. On one level, many feminists are afraid of being called "prudes." Recently we, or to be most honest, I feel an overwhelming desire to prove that a feminist can look just as good as the next girl in high heels. I have even been known to argue that Madonna is more fun to have for a role model than Margaret Thatcher. However, the question remains, is involvement in sexual material empowering for a woman artist, does it come from secure parity with the male point of view, or is it only a re-make of the old dilemma of the sex symbol?

Being a totem is powerful but limiting. Totems may be worshipped but they are not allowed to go out and change the world. The female experiences power merely as embodying what is forbidden to the male. She is denied her own experience of creating and violating taboos.

The female sharing in the male experience of violation, rather than creating her own, has been a significant undercurrent to "bad girl" art that encompasses many of the artists reviewed by Robins. A side to this discussion not looked at by Robins is that, unfortunately, "bad girl" artists often find themselves in the bind of the promiscuous tomboy, flaunting our adolescent sexuality so we can be "one of the boys." All this gets us, in the end, is a bad reputation. We do not get invited to the prom.

Anyway, Robins' article is itself "ladies speaking among themselves" as long as we only compare "good girls" to "bad girls." To test whether "bad girl" is a truly liberating position, we must also examine what is meant by "bad boys."

Peter Schjeldahl's recent review of the deKooning/Dubuffet exhibit at Pace brings some interesting information to this discussion ("Female Trouble," *Village Voice*, January 8, 1991.) Schjeldahl defines a bad boy as one who desecrates the image of the Woman and then experiences shame at his destructiveness. He uses the term "Woman" but it is clear he is talking about the Mother, in an almost Freudian sense of the word. He states that "A grownup straight male artist is perhaps a good boy who has made a vocation of maximizing the pleasure of being bad while minimizing its expense." Female artists share the pleasure of being bad. To a surprising extent, our work also involves rebellion against the Mother. The question remains whether it is possible for us to experience "being bad" and escape punishment as male artists do. Can we minimize its expense?

While male artists may create objects representing the female that they then violate to play out being bad, we often locate our focus on our own bodies. Some of the most problematic "bad girl" work is not in the realm of painting and sculpture, but performance art. In order to be "bad girls," artists such as Karen Finley set up their own bodies as the Mother and re-enact deKooning-like desecration on themselves. Even in a more socially acceptable sense, the need to "be bad" in the sense of "being sexy" often comes from a resolve on the part of a woman not to look like the Mother. There was a time when high heel shoes, lingerie, and make-up were more clearly examined as distortions of "natural" beauty. Today they are being held up as symbols of freedom.

Ultimately feminist artists must face their ambivalence about the need to desecrate the female form in order to live up to a "bad" reputation. Being bad, flaunting sexual knowledge and rebelling against the Mother are inextricably

linked for both "bad girls" and "bad boys." The difference for "bad girls" lies in the fact that we are playing dangerous games with our own image. The mother's threat, "Wait until you are a mother" comes true and we grow up to find that we may have unwittingly contributed to new stereotypes for women to overcome.

How can "being bad" be bad?... or, as Madonna has recently asserted, in a less articulate fashion, it's her body and her choice to be a sex symbol and isn't that what feminism is all about? The distinction between enjoying our sexuality and "being sexy" seems to have gotten lost in this discussion. "Being sexy" is an historically, culturally determined status. Embracing and enjoying our sexuality is a not-yet-achieved right. "Being sexy" is therefore an enjoyable, but highly problematic experience, much in the way that the compliment "You paint like a man" was once received by women artists.

Madonna would be a truly "bad girl" if, instead of demonstrating to a generation of young women how to make big business from being a fetish, she would be a pioneer and turn men into sex objects. In short, Madonna is no Mae West. Her videos show the variety of ways women play out assigned roles and at best raise the issue that "femaleness" is merely a costume change. She does not deal with the consequences of "playing dress-up;" that we grow up to be who we pretend to be, especially when it comes to male-generated fantasies.

As a woman artist who frankly enjoys using categories like "good girl" vs. "bad girl" myself, it is time for a confession. Most artists, myself included, male and female, were nerds in high school. We were rebellious, yes, but in an intellectual way. Most of us were not successful at the dating game. Male artists complain that they were not jocks and female artists complain that we were not cheerleaders. As adults we enjoy recreating "high school" in a sense. We enjoy our second chance as adults to join the cool crowd. In subliminal and not so subliminal ways, we want to flaunt our "sexiness." The last thing we want is the label "good boy" or "good girl."

The bottom line, though, is what does the label "bad girl" really get a woman artist. The cultural understanding of a "bad girl" is a "sexually available" woman and it is a fine line to tread that one is "bad" in her art but not "bad" in her life. Recently Virginia Woolf's myth of Shakespeare's sister has been haunting me. Shakespeare's sister, according to Woolf's allegory, as a tremendously creative woman of her time, found her way to the theater door, but not as a playwright or actor, both forbidden at the time. No, the director finds her spirit enchanting, takes her in, and seduces her. Historically, that has too often been the result of confusing a woman's talents with her sexual persona. Can we honestly state that today we may "choose" to be seduced or seductive, so the results are less diminishing?

This confusion between a woman's art and her self is a key issue for all feminist artists, whether addressed in our work or not. As long as articles, such as *Vogue*'s coverage of Frida Kahlo's eyebrows, appear, I must question whether my art or my "sexiness" are fundamental to my development as an artist. Perhaps, this is why I can enjoy calling myself a "bad girl" but I get nervous when it is a category employed for understanding feminist art.

Robins questions the efficacy of "good girl" feminist artists and theoreti-

cians. The answer, quite simply, is that some feminists fight the battle for respect, just as others fight for liberation. Perhaps, "good girl" feminists have figured out that being a "bad girl" has its limits when it comes to achieving respect. Being a "good girl," after all, holds its own form of power — the power of sadistic withholding.

To downplay the sexual and withhold one's favors can sometimes get you more attention than red lipstick. As my mother always told me, her "bad girl," "Why buy the cow when she gives her milk for free?"

— Barbara Pollack

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