



NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FACULTY OF FINE ART
DEPARTMENT OF SCULPTURE

- SEXUALITY AND BODY LANGUAGE -

Images of the body and sexuality in feminist art practice.

by

Stephanie Condon Casey

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and
Complementary Studies in candidacy for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts.

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Sexuality and Body Language -

images of the body in feminist art practice.

INTRODUCTION

A problematic, borrowed from developments in Marxist philosophy, defines the underlying theoretical or ideological field which structures the forming of concepts and the making of statements (Parker & Pollock, 1987, p.80).

i Why choose to look at feminist art?

Images of nudity, nakedness and sexuality employed as signifiers in art engage in discourse with the underlying problematic. The concepts "nudity", "nakedness" and "sexuality" are defined by a theoretical and ideological field which is of strategic importance to the maintenance of the current dominant culture. Because these theories and ideologies underpin the current economy of the sexes they are pervasive and resist subversive intervention. They are well defended against attempts to form concepts or make statements about nudity, nakedness and sexuality that are situated outside their field.

Feminist artists are motivated to make such an attempt by the conviction that the prevalent problematic which underlies the concepts of nudity, nakedness and sexuality is inaccurate with regard to female sexuality and that this

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Feminist artists are motivated to make such an attempt by the conviction that the prevalent problematic which underlies the concepts of nudity, nakedness and sexuality is inaccurate with regard to female sexuality and that this

contributes to the maintenance of (patriarchal) dominant/submissive cultural practices. A great many women document abusive and oppressive practices directed towards them as part of their personal experience of the current economy of the sexes. The tenet that "the personal is political" is an important proposition in a feminist cultural critique, which will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis. In some instances within the text a link is established between the visual signifiers of prevalent culture and the effect of that culture on a personal and political economy of the sexes.

This thesis derives from a moment of insight. In June 1992, I made a room in which I projected eighty images of a naked woman onto an eight foot by twelve foot screen. Certain men seemed to derive voyeuristic pleasure from the images. As Laura Mulvey says in Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema:

...voyeurism,...has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness (Mulvey, 1985, p.811).

The association between sadism and voyeurism will be examined in more detail later in this essay. Here I discuss some aspects of sadism to explain the shock I sustained at a voyeuristic uptake of my work.

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The association between sadism and voyeurism will be examined in more detail later in this essay. Here I discuss some aspects of sadism to explain the shock I sustained at a voyeuristic uptake of my work.

Prevalent theories of sadism, as described by Freud in Three Essays on Sexuality (1905), are based on the notions of the desire for (sexual) pleasure in the humiliation and wounding of an "other" and the desire of the "other" for domination and pain. The instance of masochistic complicity is presumed to derive from a masochistic disposition, described as the passive form of a sadistic disposition. Freud asserts that sado/masochism and exhibitionism/voyeurism are among certain impulses to "perversion" which "occur in paired opposites" (Freud, c.1953, pps.73,81). The theories described are among the bases for popular contentions that sadistic behaviour directed (by force) towards an unwilling "other" is invited by the (subconsciously expressed) masochistic desire of the "other". This implies that victims of sadistic attack are complicit in the event or that visual display of the (female) body is exhibitionist and complicit in voyeuristic uptake.

These are not contentions with which I necessarily concur but which, unwillingly, non-intentionally, I had invited in relation to my work because I had inadvertently used a language which had been written by men, for men. My colonised eye had reproduced images which were reviewed as "the soft focus, semi-pornographic imagery usually associated with the sale of cosmetics" (City Entertainer,

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Dublin, June 1992). I found myself with questions to answer. What is female sexuality? How is sexuality described within the prevalent culture? What is the effect of these descriptions on women? Can alternative descriptions be proposed? Who proposes alternative descriptions of sexuality and why?

Feminist writers and artists are engaged in the process of a cultural critique of the current economy of the sexes. A feminist critique of sexual theory inserts the female voice. As an artist and as a woman, I acknowledge that I am a feminist. The thesis is approached from this perspective and makes a critical comparison between feminist art and art which endorses patriarchal sexual theory.

ii Strategies and comparative criteria.

This thesis addresses the issues of nudity, nakedness and overt sexual imagery in feminist art practice. Various feminist artists have engaged with the patriarchal problematic and attempted to subvert traditional readings of the female body, the male body and sexuality. Attempts to represent the female and/or male body outside the field of the patriarchal problematic encounter a number of strategic problems. Such work may be recuperated for voyeuristic or fetishistic purposes by certain males.

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Accusations of pornography may be levelled. Feminist artworks which aim to offer a critique of prevalent culture and the art establishment may be excluded by that establishment or sometimes included without acknowledgment of the critique and practices that inform them.

In response, feminist artists aim to stay one jump ahead. They investigate female sexuality by analysis (Mary Kelly) and an overt and sexual display of the female body (Carolee Schneeman, Suzanne Santoro, Zoe Leonard, Annie Sprinkle). They propose a reading of female sexuality which does not conform to a patriarchal description (Pauline Cummins, Louise Walsh). Feminist artists locate and subvert the sex/violence divide (Adrian Piper, Sue Williams). But male artists strive to consolidate ownership and control over sex/violence and the female image as male fetish (Eric Fischl, Jeff Koons with La Cicciolina, David Salle). How do feminist artists reply?

From a visual point of view, the central question I am asking is how does the body image function as signifier for feminist artists? Broadly, the criteria I apply to assess this question and the effect of feminist interventions on the patriarchal problematic of sexuality are:

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- 1 ...the extent to which the female body image is unavailable for patriarchal voyeuristic uptake and/or fetshisation, and
- 2 ...the extent to which the overt sexual image is unavailable for patriarchal voyeurist uptake and fetishisation.

Chapter 1.

Feminist Artists and Sexuality.

- i Feminist artists and art establishment exclusions.

In the mid 1960's, women artists began to discover their history, context and practice. The women's liberation movement and radical feminism led to the elaboration of art theory which could explain why women artists were invisible to art history. Discussing the late sixties and early seventies in the preface to Framing Feminism, (1987) Parker and Pollock note that feminist art historians have analysed the "underpinnings of art practice today" which inform notions of genius and the preoccupation of art with "it's own procedures and protocols (Modernism)":

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Figure 1. "Celebrations at the National Maternity Hospital", Pauline Cummins, temporary installation, 1984. (This work was painted over by hospital authorities one week after completion).



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We established that there was a correlation between the value system that sustains the institutions of art and the sexual division that structures our society; the notion of genius is gender specific (Parker & Pollock, 1987, p.xiii).

This analysis places the woman artist in a dilemma. In an institution which is gender specific to males, entry can be achieved if she assumes "neutral" gender. The growing number of women artists at the start of the seventies who rejected this practice were reciprocally rejected by the art establishment of the day. In From the Center (1976) Lucy Lippard examined this situation. Women artists who chose to affirm their female experience were put in the position of voluntarily excluding themselves from "the 'real world' of sales and seriousness" and were encouraged to do so by the art establishment.

...they [women artists] have the tragic choice of rejecting the only outlet for their work (the magazine and museum systems) or of rejecting their feminist consciousness and its effect on their work and, by implication, rejecting themselves" (Lippard, 1976, p.124).

For instance, Irish artist and feminist Pauline Cummins graduated from NCAD in 1969 and first came to public notice in 1984 with "Celebrations at the National Maternity Hospital", a temporary installation (Fig. 1) which caused indignation amongst patrons of the Hospital and critics.

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Discussing her work for the catalogue of Irish Women Artists, a 1987 review exhibition, critic Aidan Dunne says that Pauline Cummins "has ...been interested in expressing the maternal experience in terms of exuberant sensuality" (Dunne, 1987, p.62).

However Cummins has been deeply involved in analysis of the patriarchal problematic of nudity and sexuality. As Dunne omits this from his discussion the effect is to consider Cummins' work by art establishment criteria without acknowledging that a critique of art establishment values informs the work. Cummins had situated paintings of naked, pregnant women in a Maternity Hospital administered by a female religious order. She addressed the aesthetic, social and religious values which have informed images of maternity in Western art, primarily the image of the "Madonna" where spiritual, asexual motherhood displaces the physical events and sexuality associated with childbirth. This was also an area of female experience which had not been included in the theoretical or ideological field structuring concepts of nudity. Joan Fowler, in her essay in Irish Women Artists notes:

Pauline Cummins's view questions who is to say what is worthy of consideration in an art context. Male sexuality is legitimate but childbirth isn't? Seen in this light a hierarchy of fine art values looms before us, narrow, prejudiced and sexist (Fowler, 1987, p.76).

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ii Freud on sexuality and sadism.

In the 1970's, the work of women artists including the female or male body was only acceptable to the art establishment if it did not attempt to question or subvert the patriarchal problematic of nudity and sexuality. Up until the mid-sixties, very little art by women had diverged from existing art values. It is popular to suppose early documentation of women's sexual fantasies constitutes proof that women "inherently" conform to the sexual theories that underlie prevalent images of women.

My Secret Garden, edited by Nancy Friday, was published in 1973. The fantasies contributed by women reflect the image of female sexuality which had previously been purveyed almost exclusively by men. Why did so many of the women fantasise sexual encounters where they were in one way or another "taken by force"?

Male sexual theories which address this question were described in detail by Freud in a selection of essays (1905-1953) collected under the title On Sexuality (c. 1953). Freud's Three Essays on Sexuality (1905) remain informative today as a description of the sexual theories of the patriarchal male and how they can influence sexuality, sustain the dominant (patriarchal) culture and inform the making of images.

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In these essays Freud describes many aspects of sexual behaviour as "perversions". For instance, he describes children and adult women as "polymorphously perverse". That is, he ascribes to them an innate aptitude for all possible kinds of "sexual irregularities" under the influence of seduction. Much of the anecdotal evidence Freud recorded from his female patients documented childhood sexual encounters with an adult male. Freud chose to describe this evidence as fantasy (innate aptitude) on the part of the child. The taste for what Freud calls "perversions" in adult sexual behaviour is ascribed to the woman's "polymorphous disposition".

Prostitutes exploit the same polymorphous, that is, infantile, disposition ...and, considering the immense number of women who are prostitutes or who must be supposed to have an aptitude for prostitution ...it becomes impossible not to recognize that this same disposition to perversions of every kind is a general and fundamental human characteristic (Freud, c.1953, p.109).

On one level, Freud's conclusion describes the male sexual theory that although "under ordinary conditions she [the woman] may remain normal sexually" a disposition to "perversions of every kind" is a human (male) characteristic and is to the taste of the woman (or child) (Freud, c.1953, p.109). He admits that "perverse" varieties of sexual behaviour are "rarely absent from the

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sexual life of healthy people" and that it is "inappropriate to use the word perversion as a term of reproach" (Freud, c.1953, p.74). Yet by repeated use of the term "normal" and insistently contrasting "normality" and "perversion" Freud creates a hierarchy into which he struggles to fit his observations on the polymorphous nature of sexuality.

In this attempt, he elaborates behaviours he expected in a sexually "normal" woman especially the transfer of clitoral and (active) infantile polymorphous sexuality into passive vaginal sexuality. In girls, this was achieved at puberty by intensified repression to overtake "a piece of masculine sexuality" (Freud, c.1953, p.143). He accepts sexual excitation of the clitoris as "normal" in childhood as a model of the sexual manifestation of the other sex. Women who retained the excitation of the clitoris and/or many erotogenic zones as a sexual aim in adulthood had not successfully transferred erotogenic susceptibility to the vagina and were described by Freud as "anaesthetic". He also admitted the effect on female health caused by achieving "normal" female sexuality.

The fact that women change their leading erotogenic zone in this way, together with the wave of repression at puberty, ...are the chief determinants of the greater proneness of women to neurosis and especially to hysteria. These determinants, therefore, are intimately related to the essence of femininity (Freud, c.1953, p.144).

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The fact that women change their leading erogenic zone in this way, together with the wave of repression at puberty, ... are the chief determinants of the greater proneness of women to neurosis and especially to hysteria. These determinants, therefore, are intimately related to the essence of femininity (Freud, c.1923, p.144).

Freud's description of the theory of female "normality" is dependent upon a kind of psychological clitoridectomy. This confirms the integrity of the penis for the man and relieves his castration anxiety. The capacity of this "normal" woman to view herself as a sexually active agent is excised by male sexual theory. A sexually assertive woman who retains polymorphous sexuality is thereby engaged in "perversion", associated with prostitution, and may be deemed criminal.

The concept of "normal" also occurs in Freud's description of male sexual aggression. Freud proposes that this is "normal" for "most male human beings". He characterises it as "a desire to subjugate; the biological significance of it seems to lie in the need for overcoming the resistance of the sexual object by means other than the process of wooing" (i.e. by force) (Freud, c.1953, p.71). There is no reference to rape in the essays in On Sexuality. The development of a need to force a sexual encounter upon a resistant sexual object is described as a "normal" response to "normal" female passivity. In boys this aggression was achieved in puberty by intensification of libido.

[P]ubertal repression in women serves as a stimulus to the libido in men and causes an increase of its activity. ...[T]here is also an increase of sexual overvaluation which only emerges in full force in relation to a woman who holds herself back and who denies her sexuality (Freud, c.1953, p.143).

Freud's description of the theory of female "normality" is dependent upon a kind of psychological castration. This confirms the integrity of the penis for the man and relieves his castration anxiety. The capacity of this "normal" woman to view herself as a sexually active agent is excised by male sexual theory. A sexually assertive woman who retains polymorphous sexuality is thereby engaged in "perversion", associated with prostitution, and may be deemed criminal.

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Freud sees the roots of sadism as "easy to detect in the normal", as he has defined it above. He characterises sadism as a "perversion" when "satisfaction is entirely conditional on the humiliation and maltreatment of the object" (Freud, c.1953, p.71). Sadistic behaviours were discussed earlier, and Freud's description of male sexual theory makes it clear that they are substantially indistinguishable from "normal" male sexual aims. Also, in Freud's view, "normal" passive female sexual aims predispose women to masochistic sexuality.

Freud uses the term "normal" to endorse sexual behaviour that serves certain political purposes in the dominant (patriarchal) culture. In elaborating concepts of perversion and normality he engages in a denial of his own observations on sexuality, a tendency which persists in later revised theories (Female Sexuality, 1931). "Only if her development follows the third, very circuitous, path does she reach the normal female attitude..." (Freud, c.1953, p.376). Freud evades the questioning of cultural influences by asserting that sexuality is "normal or perverse", "essential", "instinctive" and gender specific.

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iii Scopophilia and female beauty.

The act of looking provides a powerful pathway for sexual excitation and pleasure. Freud describes the urge to seek sexual pleasure in looking as "scopophilia", which he describes as an instinct and the most frequent pathway for libidinal excitation (Freud, c.1953, p.69). If the object of the look is female, and if the male spectator is possessed by "normal" patriarchal sexuality his response will include the desire to subjugate. If it (she) is seen as sexually available and eager it (she) is guilty of "perversion" and he punishes by the act of looking. If it (she) is seen as "normal" or sexually unavailable he overcomes this resistance by the act of looking. The associations between voyeurism and sadism are clear. Visual art is frequently used as a means to satisfy the scopophilic urge:

The progressive concealment of the body which goes along with civilization keeps sexual curiosity awake. This curiosity seeks to complete the sexual object by revealing its hidden parts. It can, however, be diverted ('sublimated') in the direction of art, if its interest can be shifted away from the genitals on to the shape of the body as a whole (Freud, c.1953, p.69).

Beauty in the sexual object (when female) is seen to contribute to natural selection (Freud, c.1953, p.69), insofar as the sexual object arouses libidinal excitation.

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Female beauty in patriarchal male sexual theory is linked to passivity, and to various mutilations which restrict assertive behaviour (foot binding, emaciation, stiletto heels). These mutilations may also be fetishised, as described later in this essay. Where art provides a pathway for libidinal excitation of the patriarchal male it is possible to find works which serve as fetish, satisfy the impulses of the voyeur, and are associated with sadism. These images supply "pleasure in looking" to the patriarchal male.

The atmosphere of the 1960's was one where the use of the nude female in performance art directed by men was extreme. Emaciation became fashionable as a sign of beauty in the female sexual object, with an attendant epidemic of anorexia and bulimia nervosa. In Western culture, women striving to conform to this sign of beauty often live in a state of famine amongst plenty. This severely curtails their health and energy, rendering them less likely to question patriarchal sex role stereotypes.

One of the first women to challenge this blanket control of the female image was Carolee Schneeman, who had regularly appeared naked in Happenings. This led her to reject her role as "...an image, but not an Image Maker, creating my own self image" (1968) (Lippard, 1976, p.126). Since 1962 Carolee Schneeman has been directing her own work as a

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Figure 2. "Body Collage", Carolee Schneeman, performance, 1968.



Figure 3. "Body Collage", Carolee Schneeman, performance, 1968.



multi media body artist. Her performances were transgressive, erotic and risk taking. She choreographed the Judson Dance Theatre and established her own Kinetic Theatre in 1964. Her intent was to "give our bodies back to ourselves" and her "Meat Joy" (1964) enraged a male spectator to the point of attack. He tried to strangle her during a performance in Paris (Schneeman, 1991, p.70).

However, Schneeman had a body image that conformed to patriarchal male beauty stereotypes (Fig. 2). As a result she was known as a "body beautiful". She was seen as a "dancer" and was not acknowledged within the art establishment as a visual artist. Her role was that of an "object of vision". John Berger, in 1972, put this paradox before the television audience.

One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly into an object of vision: a sight (Berger, 1972, p.47).

iv When is a cultural intervention feminist?

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iv When is a cultural intervention feminist?

Unrecognized and invisible arbiters of behaviour dictate activities which are beyond personal control. To identify the patriarchal male surveyor in woman is to start the

process of liberation from the possessive and subjugatory intent of his look. A woman artist often becomes a feminist artist as she starts to question the theories and ideologies which inserted him into her brain. A feminist artist who wishes to include the body image, her own or that of another, or sexual imagery, in her work must engage with her situation as object of vision and sexual object in patriarchal sexual theory and art. Her intervention aims to offer a critique of these theories, with the intent of subverting the patriarchal problematic that sustains the current economy of the sexes.

A definition of feminist art cannot be simplistic, but some points of identification emerge from the diversity. Useful guidelines emerge in the response of American artist Martha Rosler (at the ICA, London, in 1980) to the question "Is the personal political?". Rosler refutes the assertion that art may be considered a feminist political statement simply because it was done by a woman. If the work narrows to "priveleged tinkering with one's solely private sphere" it serves to protect one's right to personal autonomy, but does not engage with larger issues. In Rosler's view the personal is political when it is understood to be so and

if one brings the consciousness of a larger collective struggle to bear on questions of personal life ...exposes the socially constrained within the supposed realms of freedom of action [the personal], ...is sensitive to the different situations of people within society with respect to taking control over their

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private lives ...within the context of the struggle for control over the direction of society as a whole (Parker and Pollock, 1987, p.46).

According to Rosler, a feminist cultural critique of society as a whole is involved in discourse with the cultural critique offered by other groups, who have also based political and artistic intervention on exposing the social constraints towards race, gender, income and so forth, which control their personal lives and position in society. In A New Tradition - Irish Art in the Eighties Joan Fowler elaborates on the significance this discourse in art, with regard to gender issues, drawing in part on an essay by Michele Barrett (Barret, 1982, pp.37-58).

[F]or art to be feminist, women's experience of oppression must be taken to the level of engagement with cultural politics, ...men may intellectualise and/or empathise with women's experience, but it is not their experience. The latter point seems to bar men from any role in "feminist art", but in fact it says that feminism emerges through women's experience, and this does not preclude interchange between men and women over issues of oppression, gender, sexuality, and so on (Fowler, 1990, p.59).

There is an increased investigation of gender issues by both female and male artists and it is important for feminist artists to analyse the resultant interchange. A useful analytic criterion is the extent to which some interventions may sustain rather than subvert the patriarchal problematic and this may be applied to

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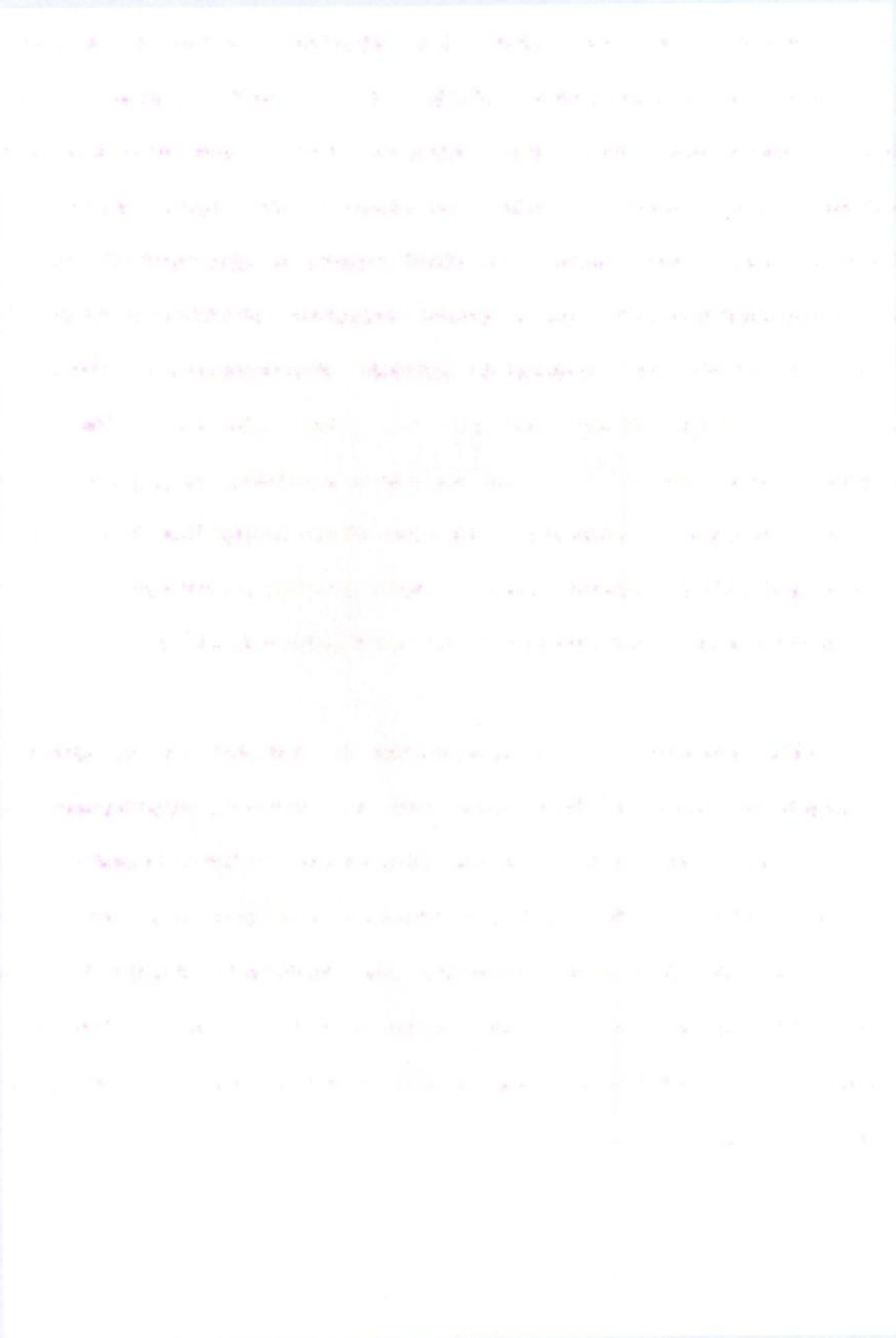
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Figure 3. "Butt (close up)", Jeff Koons, collaborative work with Ilona Staller (La Cicciolina), 1991.



Figure 2. "Buff (close up)", Jeff Koons, collaborative work with Iona Staller (La Cicciolina), 1991.



interventions which are professed as subversive of gender stereotypes.

This criterion can be used to assess the works of Jeff Koons with La Cicciolina (Fig. 3). Jeff Koons is an avowedly ambitious man and desire for fame and success motivates his work. The collaborative work with La Cicciolina may owe more to Jeff Koons's appropriation of sexual representation as a means towards notoriety than it does to a wish to question gender stereotypes. This is evident in his distribution of the images. He has displayed this work in the Gallery system, engaging with High Art values. However he has also inserted this work into pornographic magazines. Seen in this context, it is indistinguishable from popular culture pornography.

Koons' contribution to a discourse on gender is to assert that images of patriarchal male sexual theory, expressed as explicitly as possible, may be displayed interchangeably in the elite world of Art and in popular culture and may thus sustain the theories that underly the dominant culture. He asserts and endorses the pervasive control the patriarchal problematic of nudity and sexuality exerts over the process of image making.

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Chapter 2

Intransigence of the Patriarchal Problematic.

i Pornography and prostitution.

The work of Jeff Koons illustrates the intransigence of male sexual theory and its pervasive effect on image making, despite twenty five years of feminist intervention. However, evidence that sexual theory is susceptible to change can be seen in Nancy Friday's latest collection of female sexual fantasy. The rape fantasies described in My Secret Garden (1973) are not necessarily "inherent" in "essential" female sexuality. Evidence that they are the absorbed result of prevalent sexual theory can be found by making a comparison with the fantasies described in Women on Top (1991). These are mainly collected from American women under the age of thirty. The material Friday publishes is sent to her by readers of her books and she does not reveal her editorial policy. This collection shows a significant increase in the number of women who report sexual fantasies in which the woman is assertive or dominant, or both. Very few of the fantasies involve a man forcing a sexual encounter upon a woman. To what can this change be ascribed?

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Some of this change may be ascribed to editorial policy, particularly the choice of material offered by younger women. The sexuality of these women has developed in a culture informed by an overwhelming and pervasive availability of material on sexual matters. Certain scenarios seem to reflect the fantasies depicted in pornographic publishing and film, based mainly on patriarchal male sexual theory (Robinson, 1993). The general change from submissive to assertive fantasy may be due to diminished uptake of male sexual theory on female sexuality. This may be ascribed to the altering status of women in Western culture due to feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement and the elaboration of alternatives to patriarchal sexual theory.

If the theories that underlie sexual fantasy are susceptible to change then it might be expected that this would be illustrated in current visual expressions of sexuality. However, visual images that reflect patriarchal sexual theory are indispensable to patriarchal values and are vigorously defended against subversion and change, as seen in the conflation of art and pornography by Koons and the proliferation of popular culture pornography.

The problem that Carolee Schneeman and others have encountered is that the "nude" as signifier conforms to the values of patriarchal sexual theory and the "nude" (female)

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Figure 4. "Towards New Expression", Suzanne Santoro, double page from book, 1976. (It has proved impossible to trace a copy of Santoro's book, and the illustration is drawn from a photocopy printed in Spare Rib, reprinted in Framing Feminism, Parker and Pollock, 1987).

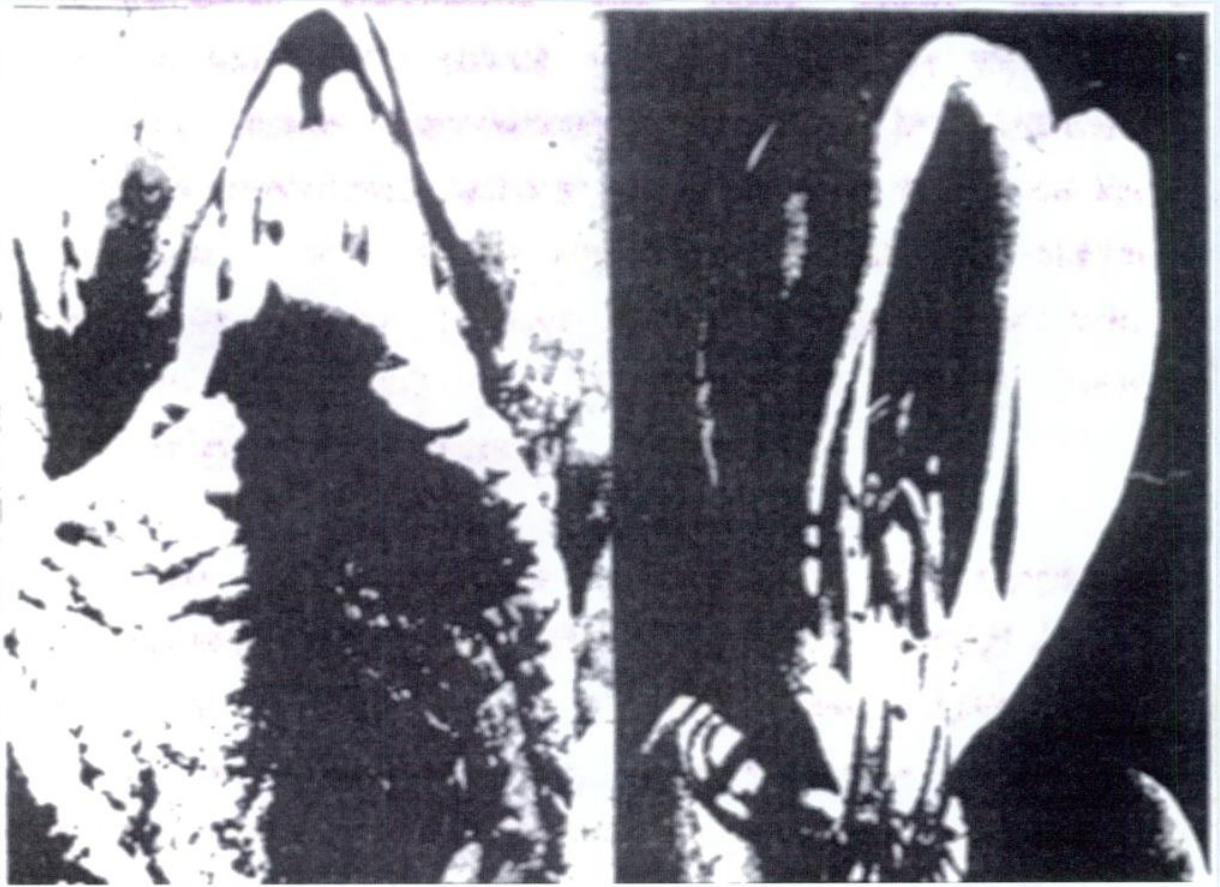


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signifies the availability of the female body and images thereof as sexual object of vision, purchase and possession. This creates enormous problems for feminist art and concepts informing uptake of the "nude" in art also underlie depictions of the body in popular culture pornography. Andrea Dworkin, writing in 1981 noted:

Pornography by definition -"the graphic depiction of whores" -is a trade in a class of persons who have been systematically denied the rights protected by the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights (Dworkin, Preface, 1981).

Sexually explicit artworks by women may be labelled pornographic by current standards. In Suzanne Santoro's 1976 book of vulva portraits, Towards New Expression, or Zoe Leonard's exhibition of vulva portraits in Documenta 1992, the intention is not the graphic depiction of prostitution, rather it is to deflect fetishisation by direct representation of the female genitalia (even so, Suzanne Santoro's book was withdrawn by the Arts Council). The images are compromised by patriarchal uptake as pornography. In Japan and China, vulva portraits were regularly circulated as a means of advertising prostitutes. In Western popular culture, pornographic magazines offer images of the vulva, known as "wide open beaver".

The main factor that distinguishes feminist vulva portraits from "wide open beaver" is their presentation within a High Art rather than popular culture context (Fig. 4). The aim

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The main factor that distinguishes feminist vulva portraits from "wide open beaver" is their presentation within a High Art rather than popular culture context (Fig. 4). The aim

is to use context to defuse and separate the conflation of body image and pornography. Feminist presentation of vulva portraits has an important role to play in questioning how the female body image is perceived within the prevalent culture. If this work is judged pornographic, the women represented are judged to be "whores". That verdict has a major role to play in the patriarchal consciousness. To undermine this particular aspect of patriarchal law, feminist artists need other definitions of pornography.

From a feminist perspective, an image may be read as pornographic if it endorses dominant/submissive sexual theories and transforms the image of a "sexual partner" into the image of a "sexual object", a fetish which elicits scopophilic and voyeuristic pleasure based on subjugation, humiliation, and the desire to punish, wound or destroy (kill). A proportion of the fantasies reported in Women on Top exhibit the desire to punish or wound but this is rare. The desire to kill is not reported. In patriarchal male sexual fantasy the fetishisation of killing and death is frequent and illustrated both in High Art and hard-core pornography.

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ii Necrophilic fetishisation of the nude.

In the description of patriarchal male sexuality proffered by Freud, the fetish replaces the absent penis of the woman and becomes an independent object of desire (Freud, c.1953, pp.65-68). Castration anxiety caused by female lack of a penis is thus relieved. Phallic replacement is achieved by various techniques. These include introduction of phallic substitutes, constriction or mutilation of body parts, fragmentation of body parts. As noted in the discussion earlier of scopophilia, the whole body image may also attain the status of fetish.

When a record of performance body artwork is frozen by photography or film it can be assessed for the presence in the image of concepts informed by the patriarchal problematic of nudity and sexuality. This is more subtle in film or video as the illusion of movement and duration is retained. One of the characteristics of the nude (female) that may be detected is that of necrophilic fetish. Photographic record shares this necrotic stillness, hence the power of pornographic nude photographs. Necrophilia, the desire for and sexualisation of death, plays an important role in patriarchal male sexual theory which engages the male in a discourse of fear and desire with nature, sex and death. One way of doing this is to conflate the female body, sex and death.

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In the rape scenarios attributed to Jupiter, Zeus, Neptune and so on, the female nudes (Amphitrite, Antiope, Daphne, Callisto, Danae, Europa...) show little distress, their attraction is necrophilic for they might as well be dead. The only escape is into death or living death, as with Daphne (who was turned into a tree). The male spectator assuages his fear and desire of sex and death as represented by the nude (female) by controlling the female image. The Classical male nude appears as creator, warrior, rapist (active) and corpse (passive). The active male nude reassures the male spectator of phallic potency. But the presence of the male in the artwork confirms the inevitability and eroticism of death. Fintan O'Toole notes with regard to painting:

"The living subject is turned into an inanimate object, a dead thing. Every self-portrait is a consideration of death: it is the creation of a dead self, an image of how the self will look when the painter is dead. ...That fixed image there will be imperishable while the painter's own flesh changes and decays" (O'Toole, 1990).

Nudity in artwork about Christian myth is explicitly necrophilic but offers a solution to death. In this instance it promotes a central attraction of patriarchal Monotheism, the theory of rebirth through death which transforms killing into a (male) act of generation. The model for the male nude is the image of Christ crucified.

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Figure 5. "The martyrdom of St. Agatha" (detail),
Sebastiano del Piombo, c. 1485-1547.

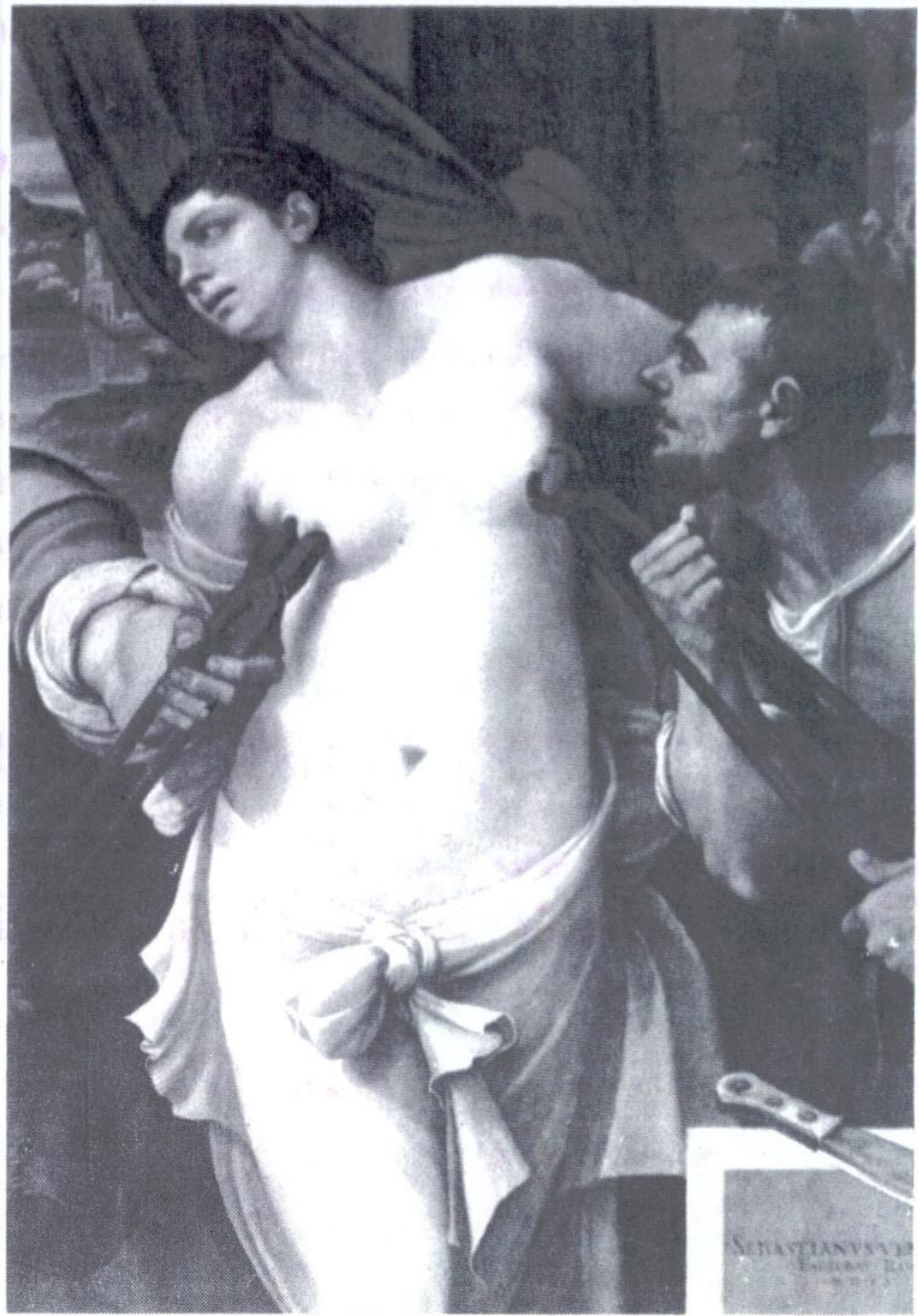


Figure 5. "The martyrdom of St. Sebastian" (detail), Sebastiano del Piombo, c. 1485-1547.



The flaccid body reflects penile detumescence (the little death) but we are assured that within three days he will arise again. Death will be conquered, the realm of nature and mortality will be held at bay by the power of the Father.

The nude (female) is depicted during sadistic mutilation before the actual moment of death. Another list: Saints Agatha, Agnes, Appolonia, Barbara, Catherine of Alexandria. Their common history is that they attract the lust of a man, whom they refuse. They are sexually tortured for purity, thus violated, then killed (reborn). Again, the woman shows little distress. Mastectomy was a popular torture and these images proliferated in the time of the European witchcraze (Fig. 5). Fetishisation of death and patriarchal male attraction to the graphic depiction of women and whores as necrophilic fetish constitute particularly intransigent aspects of the problematic of nudity and sexual imagery. Feminist artists contend that the processes which lead to necrophilic fetishisation are not "biologically inherent" in sexuality, as described by Freud, but derive from the operation of dominant/submissive cultural practices. In support of this contention feminists turn to and elaborate analyses of cultural and linguistic theories of personality and sexuality.

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Chapter 3

What is Female Sexuality?

i Lacan on vision and language.

The development of personality and sexuality has been elaborated in terms of the acquisition of language by Jacques Lacan. Lacan returned to Freud and revealed what had been obscured by most post-Freudians (Jones, Kris, Deutsch and so forth). Lacan found Freud's apparent reliance on biological determinants to be governed by signification and meaning (Grosz, 1990, pp.1-5). Between Freud's observations and theories lies a discourse which remains unresolved and in which Lacan found clues to the language of the subconscious. Lacan "articulated the precise means by which the unconscious speaks" (Grosz, 1990, p.13) starting from a theory for the development of the ego which he termed the "Mirror Phase". Lacan alternates between the view that the Mirror Phase is a biological process and the view that it is a "linguistically structured, socially regulated relation" (Grosz, 1990, p.32).

The Mirror Phase is preceded by the Order of the Real which Lacan describes as inexpressible, the "lack of a lack",

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The Mirror Phase is preceded by the Order of the Real which Lacan describes as inexpressible, the "lack of a lack",

when the child is in unity with the (m)other and has no awareness of self. The Mirror Phase is initiated when the child recognises that it is not merged and continuous with the (m)other and recognises a lack (her absence). Lacan places this stage at between 6 and 18 months and associates it with development of the visual sense. When the child recognises itself in the mirror, the specular image gives an illusion of physical integration in contrast to the lack of autonomy and motor control in the infant. The infant identifies with the mirror image which appears as a more perfect (externalised) self (Grosz, p.32). From this time on, splitting, lack and the desire to supply this lack lead it through the specular order of images and representations (the Imaginary order) to language and significations (the Symbolic order) (Grosz, 1990, p.36).

The sense of sight is central to Lacan's description of the "Imaginary" order. It is a means of domination and mastery, as in Freud's description of scopophilia and in Sartre's essay The Look (Sartre, 1974). Lacan's oculo-centrism leads to a phallogocentrism which both he and Freud express. The sense of sight can compare the appearance of female genitalia with the appearance of male genitalia, leading to the theories that the female lacks a sexual organ and that the male organ is directly associated with power and authority in patriarchy (Grosz, 1990, p.39).

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For Lacan, the (sexual) drives are not analysed as "biological" but as they are manifested in the data of speech. Need, demand and desire are linked respectively to the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic orders. For Lacan, biological need is short lived, linked with the physical requirements of early infancy. Demand is transitive, directed at an other, usually (m)other but particularised by the existence of an object. It is linguistic, social and interpersonal. It is not yet regulated by a signifying and social order (Grosz, 1990, pp.58-63).

For Lacan, desire shares aspects of need and demand but is barred from articulation by repression which leads to the formation of the "unconscious" and the indirect articulation of desire by means of a signifier. Desire is concerned with its own internal logic of the signifier, and is transpersonal. Its emergence marks the child's entry into the "Symbolic" order, the domain of the "Other" in which the child must find a place to become a "speaking subject". Lacan relates this process to Freud's Oedipal scenario and describes entry to the Symbolic order in terms of the child's relationship to the "Symbolic Father" signifier of law, order and authority (Grosz, 1990, pp.61-72).

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ii Feminism, Lacan and the female word.

Lacan's Symbolic order is dominated by phallogocentric signifiers, especially the "Phallus" (power and authority). The woman is positioned in relation to the Phallus and because she does not have the Phallus she requires and does not share in its authority, expressing an unconscious desire related to Freud's "penis envy". The entry of a boy into the Symbolic order is unimpeded, but the entry of a girl is tenuous and marginal. When she speaks, she imitates the masculine "Phallic" subject but her position as a speaking subject in her own right is ambiguous (Grosz, 1990, pp.61-72). Some feminist authors defend the Phallic signifier as intrinsically neutral in signifying power (Ragland-Sullivan, Mitchell, in Grosz, 1990, pp.123-124). Grosz claims that the "Phallic signifier is not a neutral 'third' term against which both sexes are analogously or symmetrically positioned":

The relation between the penis and Phallus is not arbitrary but socially and politically motivated ...by the already existing structures of patriarchal power and its effects guarantee the reproduction of this particular form of social organisation and no other (Grosz, 1990, p.124).

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equated with power. The specular domain of the Imaginary is the domain of images, objects of vision and demand. The linguistic domain of the Symbolic is the domain of the Phallus, law, language and desire. Lacan's description allows male/female relations to be explained in linguistic, therefore historical terms. For feminists this allows the possibility of change to be articulated. Articulation, inscription and the use of language by women can become a structurally subversive entry into the Symbolic order.

Feminist theorists analyse the production of sexed subjectivity and may elaborate Lacan's theories on the element of linguistics as historical force (Kristeva) or question omissions and repressions in psychoanalysis (Irigaray) to "elaborate a theory of enunciation which makes explicit the position of woman as a speaking subject" (Grosz, 1990, p.149). In the Post Partum Document Mary Kelly describes birth and child-rearing with reference to Lacanian, Freudian and feminist psychoanalytical theories (Kelly, 1975-78).

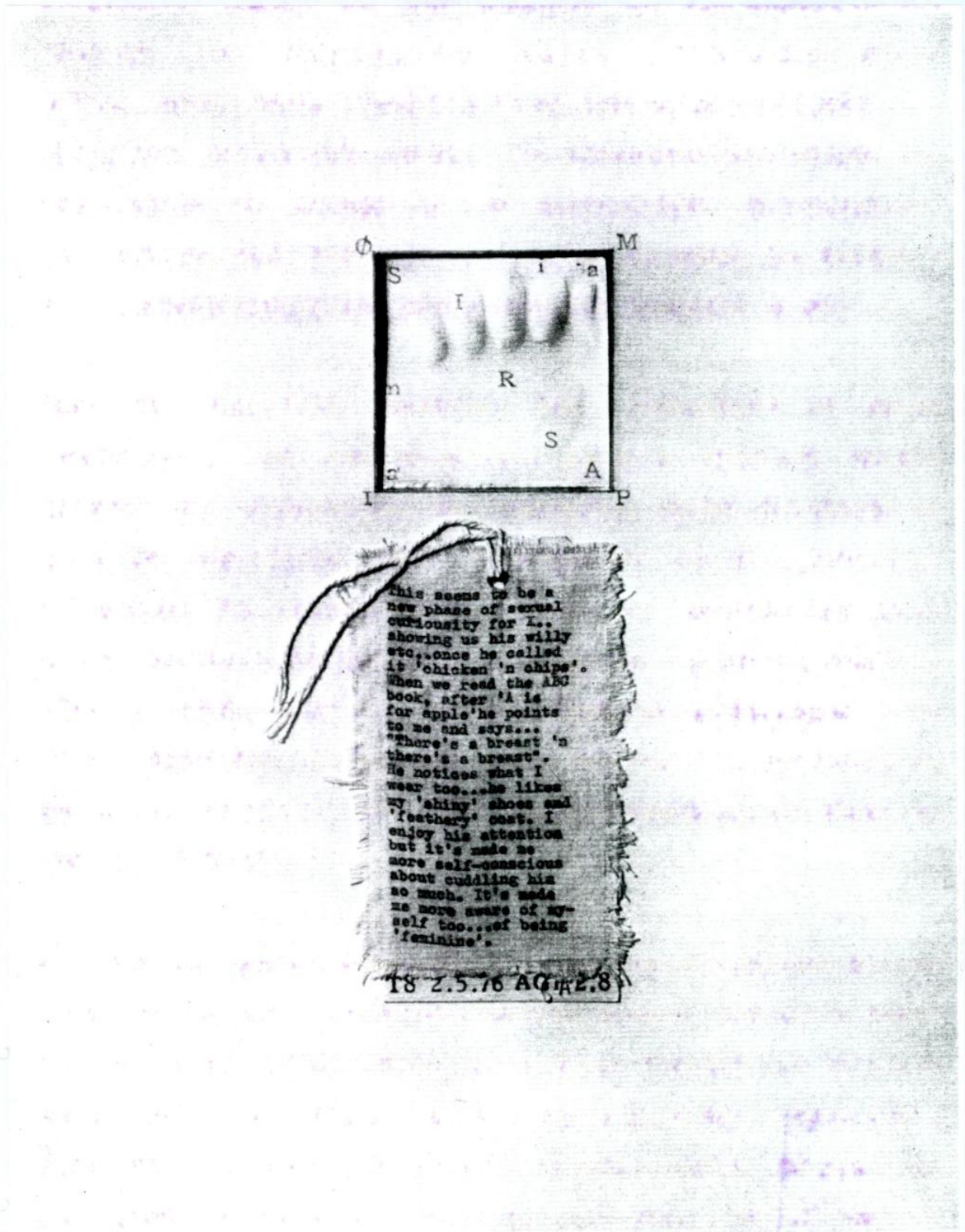
For Lacan, when a woman has a child she is rewarded by the illusion of entry into the Symbolic order. The child takes on the role of her "Phallus" and her function is to raise this child (if male) to the Symbolic order. Mary Kelly examines the workings of this illusory entry and presents inscribed evidence of a series of events. She chooses to

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Figure 6. "Post partum document", Documentation IV (detail), Mary Kelly, 1975-78.





present this outside the field of the usual visual signifiers which situate woman as specular object of vision (associated with the Imaginary order) and invests language and signification (associated with the Symbolic order) in the experience of maternity. The artworks are not "art objects" but elements in a linguistic discourse that require "work" on the part of the spectator (Fig. 6).

Kelly relies substantially on Lacan's theories and reports her personal experience of the pain she experienced from "undergoing castration for the second time and re-learning the fact of her negative place in the Symbolic order" (Mulvey, in Parker & Pollock, 1987, p.203). Kelly did not respond with the (expected) rebellion which fetishises the child and refuses to allow it to achieve independence or the alternative (expected) acceptance of her negative place in the Symbolic order. The obsessive documentation is a type of fetishisation where the child as potential fetish is replaced by an art object as fetish. Kelly is subversive because the process of transferring evidence of her particular experience of maternity into language is articulated by herself as subject. As a woman she is a member of a group who, according to patriarchal theory, have the "creative ability" to bear children and as a result do not require to express themselves or their experience in language. Certain articulations of maternity by women (Cassat, Morisot) have ambiguous tenure in orders

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of meaning dominated by patriarchal theory because the female image is often situated as object (of vision and description) in the work. Kelly's work insists on the situation of herself as speaking subject.

Female experience has been "spoken for" by man in terms of woman's sexed role in patriarchy. For instance, desire for and sexual pleasure in childbirth ("genetophilia") and the signifying power of the female generative act is undermined by patriarchal myth (Genesis, 3:16), theory (Freud, Lacan) and by male medicalisation of birth. As with clitoridectomy, it is often other women (nuns, teachers, nurses) who stand in as agent (Daly, c.1978, pp.154-177). Patriarchal theories of maternity, nurturing and infant development are often not corroborated in documentation by women. For instance, many women report that the (voluntary) choice to bear a child, culminating in the act of giving birth can be among the most pleasurable of women's sexual experiences (1). Birth can be described as a moment of female ejaculation. As the infant passes from the uterus through the vaginal canal it receives tactile evidence for the existence of female sexual organs.

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that biological need (Order of the Real) exists simultaneously with sensory demand and from birth infants express distress which may be ascribed not merely to hunger but to the perception of lack, discontinuity from the (m)other. The autonomous body of the (m)other may serve as a tactile representation of a more perfect self in a tactile Order of the Imaginary. It seems likely that the Order of the Real applies mainly to uterine existence and initiation of the Mirror Phase, characterised by recognition of lack and splitting, occurs at birth through the disruption of tactile unity.

Patriarchal theory ascribes fetishisation of the female body to repressed visual perception of female castration, undermining the significance of the role played by repression of tactile evidence perceived during birth and nurturing. Infant observations of female sexual organs may inform the frequent use of tactile objects as fetish representations. Lacan's patriarchal oculo-centrism (based on the visual conflation of penis/Phallus/power) places early tactile observations 6 to 18 months before initiation of the Mirror Phase and awareness of self. Lacan seems to overlook reports that suggest the possibility of a tactile Mirror Phase and tactile Order of the Imaginary preceding and supplemented by the specular Mirror Phase and visual Order of the Imaginary. Patriarchal theory abounds with similar undervaluations of

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the word of woman and her discourse as a speaking subject. The constructs of patriarchal psychoanalysis are seen as being based on major omissions.

Male medicalisation of birth and extreme polarisation of gender roles to exaggerate woman/child interdependency and excuse/exclude the male from nurturing are practices which were energetically promoted as psychoanalysis was being elaborated. This may be seen as an attempt to curtail the rise of articulate, militant women pressing for social and sexual reform. The current valorisation of dominant/submissive and/or sado/masochistic practices and imagery in dominant culture (Koons, Madonna, Salle) may be seen as symptomatic of cultural pressure to curtail non-polarised views of sexuality.

iii Female essentialism.

Male theory has insisted on vaginal-only sexuality for women and penile-only sexuality for men, a "biological essentialism" so fundamental to patriarchy that the male organ has taken on the role of primary signifier for power. One of the main difficulties for Kristeva is the continuing role of the vagina in the sexual economy. In patriarchal theory the vagina (as signifier) has a negative value relation to the Phallus. Attempts to invest the signification of power in the vagina are compromised by the

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fact that this is a mere inversion of patriarchal essentialism, and implies a discourse based on domination and polarisation. Can this position be altered if the vagina is seen as part of a much larger sexual organ, comprising clitoris, vulva, vagina, breasts, and the involvement of the whole body in female sexuality?

Luce Irigaray has extended the description of female autoeroticism into and beyond the female genitalia. Her aim is to refer to the "morphology" of the female body as a site for patriarchal power relations and for Symbolic and representational resistances". Irigaray "does not refer to the female body in biological terms, but only in so far as it is enveloped, produced and made meaningful by language" (Grosz, 1990, p.144). Irigaray describes the woman who has "sex organs more or less everywhere", whose autoeroticism is amplified into the body, "and her sexual organ, which is not 'one' organ is counted as 'none'" (Irigaray, 1981, pp.24-25). Because Irigaray invests language in the female body, her theories could easily slip into an essentialist discourse (Robinson, 1993). The danger of essentialist theory is that it posits certain behaviours as biologically independent of historical and cultural determinants and therefore not susceptible to their influence.

But [Irigaray] does also insist on the political applications. I think even if you do go back to the biological you can argue that biology is a construct itself. How you function biologically in

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one particular society is going to be different to how you function biologically in another society (Robinson, 1993).

Irigaray's questions are directed at the sexual specificity of subjects and she elaborates a discourse of the "other" (not described by patriarchy) woman as speaking subject promoting duality, creating an "other" Symbolic order. Constructing a duality between Symbolic orders may lend support to the supposed gender specificity of such constructs as necrophilia and genetophilia instead of lending support to radical re-description of all current concepts of sexuality. The Irish artist Louise Walsh suggests that deconstructions of supposed gender specificity and of dominatory practices based on race, homosexuality, income, etc., are interdependent in cultural interventions and art emerging from non-dominant cultures including female culture (Walsh, 1993).

Male art - there's a lot of things there [including] an element of the dominant culture. [I]t would make more sense to talk about people who are making art from other than dominant cultures... Contrast that with the dominant culture art. That would be more effective than talking about just biology, male/female (Walsh, 1993).

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phallogentric, patriarchal power relations. For instance one might posit that patriarchal sexual theory artificially restricts all erotic and autoerotic experiences by insisting on rigid gender roles. Essentialist constructs such as "instinctive" aggressive male sexuality and "instinctive" passive female sexuality may be described as linguistically and historically determined.

Attempts to construct non-polarised and non-polarising signifiers are undermined by the pervasive power of signifiers developed within patriarchy. Female essentialism contributes to the construction of a further order of sexed signifiers. The elaboration of non-gender-specific signifiers courts the danger that apparently "neutral" signifiers (i.e. power) are in fact currently analogous to patriarchal signifiers (i.e. Phallus). It may be that Irigaray's elaboration of an "other" Symbolic order is the only way to dislodge this analogy and that a discourse between many initially polarised Symbolic orders could eventually lead to the possibility of speaking subjectivity that is not silenced because of race, gender and so forth.

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Footnote to Chapter 3.

(1) Male medicalisation of birth and women's reports of experiences of birth are discussed in:

CARTER, Jenny & DURIEZ, Therese, With Child: Birth through the Ages, Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh, 1986.

Carter and Duriez refer to descriptions of rewarding and pleasurable experience of birth by women and the experience of birth for the infant in:

ISAACS, J. Ashford, The Whole Birth Catalog, New York, 1983.

KARMEL, M., Thank You, Dr. Lamaze: A Mothers Experience in Painless Childbirth, Philadelphia, 1959.

LEBOYER, F., Birth without Violence, London, 1975.

ODENT, M., Entering the World: the de-Medicalisation of Childbirth, London, 1984.

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Chapter 4

New Descriptions of the Nude.

i Don't be so disgusting!

Techniques for de-polarising image-making include engagement with the aesthetic of female beauty and the relation between the body and disgust. Physical aspects of women's experience such as pregnancy, birth and menstruation had been eradicated from the fetishised image of woman, although Sade had proposed abortion as a locus for necrophilic desire.

For Sade, abortion was a sexual act, an act of lust. In his system, pregnancy always demanded murder, usually the murder of the pregnant woman, rendered more exciting if she was in an advanced state of pregnancy (Dworkin, 1981, pp.96-97).

More usually, bodily processes which are not gender specific feature in sado/masochistic practice and pornography. Faeces and urine are used as a means of humiliation. In the lexicon of sado/masochism (and dominant culture) body products and processes are read as disgusting. Feminist artists may choose to subvert disgust. Adrian Piper, who engages with issues of gender and colour, soaked a set of clothes in vinegar, eggs, milk

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and cod-liver oil for a week then wore them on the evening rush hour train and in a bookshop. Lisa Tickner writes:

Since women are not expected to be disgusting, the violation of certain established taboos, like that on public reference to menstruation, symbolizes a disrespect for social order, and a rejection of the normal patterns of domination and submission which are enshrined within it. Vulgarity can be a means of enhancing dignity 'when the obscenities are merely signals conveying a message which is not obscene' (Tickner, 1987, p.272).

Annie Sprinkle, Sue Williams, Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh all engage with the female body in ways which may be described as vulgar or disgusting. They question the "aesthetic" of visual pleasure. The aesthetic of physical beauty in art and popular culture is inextricably linked with fetishisation and mutilations of the female body. These may vary somewhat from one era or cultural group to another but share a common prescriptive attribute. They propose standards of female beauty with which most women do not conform unless they invest considerable effort in self-reconstruction.

A "logical" extension of the aesthetic of the female beauty was seen in Kassel during Documenta 1992 in "post-human" virtual reality sexual acts with constructs of the female body. The common motivation in Sprinkle, Williams, Cummins and Walsh is to deconstruct the visual aesthetic of female beauty in work that may be seen as ugly and obscene by

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Figure 7. "Anatomy of a Pin-Up Photo", Annie Sprinkle, 1991.



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The anatomy of a pin-up photo is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon. It is a visual language that has evolved over time, reflecting the changing tastes and attitudes of society. At its core, the pin-up photo is a celebration of the female form, but it is also a reflection of the power dynamics between the viewer and the subject. The subject is often portrayed as an object of desire, but she is also a subject with her own agency and identity. The anatomy of a pin-up photo is a study in the interplay of these forces, and it is a testament to the enduring appeal of the female form in popular culture.

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ii Annie Sprinkle: "Fuck you guys - you wanna see pussy, I'll show you pussy!" (Sprinkle, 1991, p. 34).

Annie Sprinkle (Ellen Steinberg), an American performance artist, describes herself as a "post porn modernist". During performances entitled "A Hundred Blow Jobs" she played a tape of abusive remarks. At the same time she sucked and gagged on a range of dildoes.

This was a scene primarily for women who'd been in the sex industry. And after a dozen times I would no longer cry or gag - because I'd transformed and exorcised that demon. Now I feel free - free from all that abuse I suffered (Sprinkle, 1991, p.32).

Annie Sprinkle came to performance art via prostitution. She heard the abusive remarks in "A Hundred Blow Jobs" during about three hundred of about three thousand "blow jobs". An understanding of prostitution and "porn" movies informs Sprinkle's attempt to de-construct the fetishised image of woman and the conflation of beauty with prostitution. She satirises fetishisation, (Fig. 7), runs workshops where women explore sexuality, "transforming" themselves into "Sluts and Goddesses" (Fig. 8), onstage she

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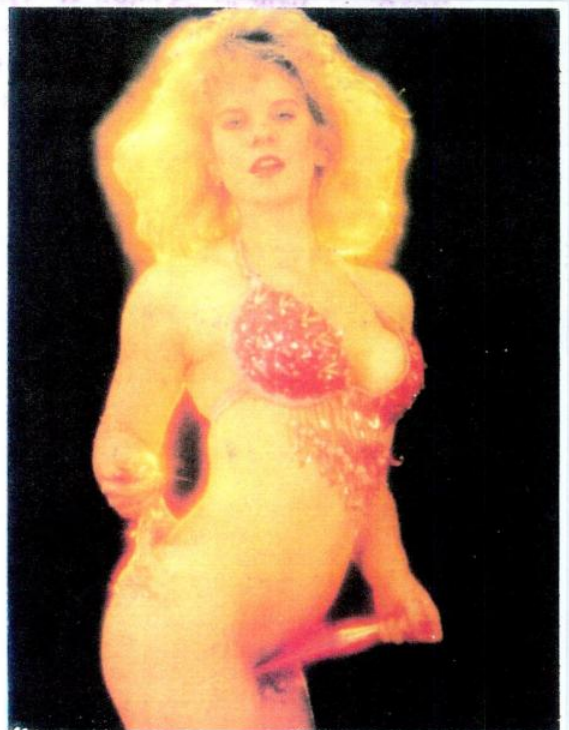
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Figure 8. "Transformation Salon", workshop for women, Annie Sprinkle, 1991.



Christine Anne Smith (a Farmer's wife and mother of four) is Sheena Storm



Cathy Worob (a Court Stenographer) is Baby Doe

Figure 8. "Transformation Salon", workshop for women, Annie Sprinkle, 1991.

The "Transformation Salon" was a workshop for women, led by Annie Sprinkle in 1991. The workshop was held in a community center and was designed to help women explore their own bodies and their relationship to their bodies. The workshop was a safe space for women to learn about their bodies and to share their experiences with others. The workshop was a transformative experience for many women, and it helped them to gain a new understanding of their bodies and their relationship to their bodies. The workshop was a powerful tool for women to learn about their bodies and to share their experiences with others.

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As with Suzanne Santoro's vulva portraits, Sprinkle's performances are susceptible to uptake within the conceptual field of patriarchal sexuality. Like Madonna, she describes herself as an artist engaged with image-making at the level of popular culture. Madonna's avowedly subversive intent does not outweigh the aggressively patriarchal content of images that are mass produced in the language of kitsch, the lowest common denominator of "ersatz" individualism (Murphy, 1992). What distinguishes Sprinkle's interventions is her commitment to personal contact and the intent of subverting fetishisation and criminalisation of sexuality by her "presence in her own body". Her techniques do not always succeed because she makes many concessions to scopophilic pleasure, to the aesthetic of female "beauty", and to dominant/submissive models of sexuality. Sprinkle's performance would be more uncompromising (but probably less popular) if she regularly applied the kind of analysis seen in "A Hundred Blow Jobs".

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Sprinkie is most subversive when she restructures sexual pleasure beyond gender, proposing a sexuality outside

patriarchal "hetero/homo" divisions. She emphasises complete body sexual technique particularly as a reponse to AIDS. She studies meditation, orgasm through breathing and the sexual philosophies of many (patriarchal) cultures such as Tantra. One of the aims of Annie Sprinkle's crusade is to dislodge the repressive effect of dominant culture on sexuality, as demonstrated by surveys in which 45% of American women report absence of orgasm during intercourse and 15% report inability to achieve orgasm at all (Lashley, Lloyd, Weiten, 1991, pp.383-387). Annie Sprinkle is a hedonist - she wants to show sexual play and pleasure. She concludes her performances by reaching orgasm on stage.

...I feel it's important that people HEAR the sound of an orgasm - it's like hearing a baby cry; it's a very pure, healing sound (Sprinkle, 1991, p.34).

Is this former prostitute who performs in theatres considered an artist by the art establishment? Her position within the art world is marginal, she conforms to few of the values which structure uptake of fine art. As a result she attracts a substantial following among feminist artists who argue that Sprinkle's investigation of the aesthetic of female beauty (and the status of prostitution) offers a subversive challenge to patriarchal art values despite her concessions to the underlying problematic.

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iii Sue Williams: putting him in the picture.

Sue Williams, unlike Annie Sprinkle, does not believe in being "nice". She makes few concessions. Certain liberal intellectuals may believe that the dominant patriarchal culture is diminishing in influence. Evidence to the contrary is overwhelming. The pornography industry is selling "snuff" movies. Thousands of women in Bosnia are being raped at the time of writing. Women's Refuges and Rape Crisis Centres are underfunded and overwhelmed by demand. Sue Williams is not optimistic - her painting is peopled by men who destroy women at home, in politics and in Art. Williams' work is political because it is intensely personal. She would prefer not to feel responsible for what she has seen and experienced but cannot refuse to be a witness:

I'm no spokesman (spokeswoman, excuse me!). I'm really a crank who is full of hate and I like painting the stories... There is so much to talk about once you get your voice working (Williams, 1992).

Sue Williams' painting is quirky, satirical, sometimes funny and often ugly. She deals with ugly subjects and may contrast them with cartoon sketches of aesthetic "beauty". She uses a monochrome palette that makes few concessions to "painterly" values and may provide a certain psychological distance for the spectator. In "I began to see..." the

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Figure 9. "I began to see...", Sue Williams, 1991.



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pose of the woman is straight out of the Fine Art tradition (Fig. 9). However, the self-aware, alert look on her face and the blood on her body is not. To insert the nude buttocks and genitalia of the man into the "picture" graphically reveals his invisible presence in most other paintings of the nude (female). The full text on the wallpaper background reads: "I began to see that they didn't respect me for who I really was".

How does the Art establishment respond to work which directly attacks traditional cultural and aesthetic values from within the museum and gallery system? Laura Cottingham identifies some critical comment in Frieze, (Summer 1992). The painting has been described as "adamant hyperbole" (Miller, 1989, p.141) or "hyberbolic eruptions" (Decter, 1989). It has been described as "equally contemptuous for men and women" (Salz, 1989), a view which is echoed by Lise Holt:

If her men are alternately dangerous and foolish, her women are apt to be contemptible, buying into self-destructive visions of themselves that facilitate their own abuse (Holt, 1991, p.149).

Can the nude (female) in "I began to see..." (Fig. 9) be described as facilitating her own abuse by the male nude? Is Holt proposing that the model for the nude (female) is willingly complicit in patriarchal sado/masochist aims?

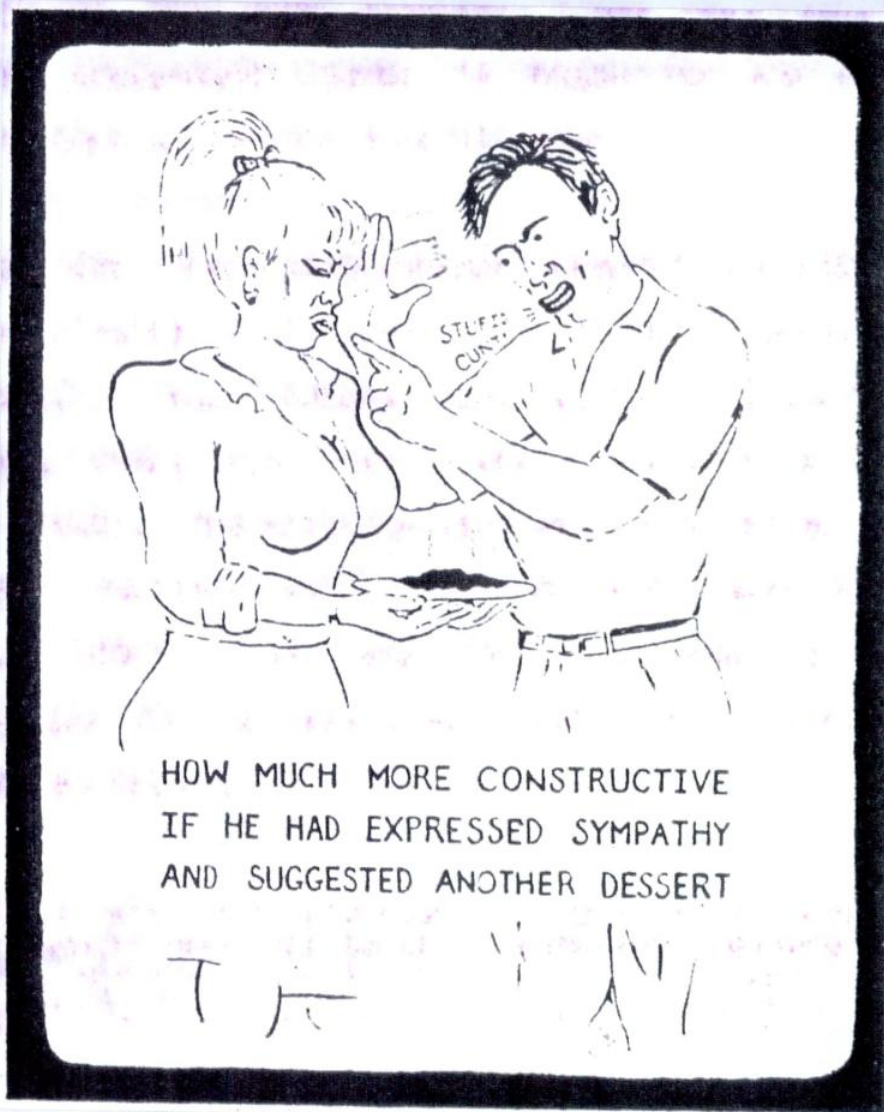
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Figure 10. "Dessert", Sue Williams, 1990.





Some critical comment seems to reflect a conviction that patriarchal sexual theory is not susceptible to subversion. Critical uptake of Williams' painting indicates that her strategy of putting the "male abuser" into the picture is only partly successful. It seems that to depict the abuser/abused relationship can serve to endorse the patriarchal problematic, despite the intent of the artist. Williams' humorous style may also work against her intent, placing her statements in the "quick fire" caricature context of the cartoon, seen and forgotten.

Perhaps the unresolved area lies in the language with which Williams invests the female image. Benjamin Weil says: "most of the insults actually refer to whores, objects of anonymous sexual consumption" (Weil, 1992, p.83). In a close look at Williams' work most of the insults refer to women in everyday encounters with men. Does Weil suppose that most women are whores because most insults to women are sexually loaded? Look for instance at "Dessert" (Fig. 10). The commonplace insult "stupid cunt" is used at every level of society and most women will have heard it at least once. Williams employs a language of polarised sexual abuse which can be construed as being caused by most women because in patriarchy most women are or could be prostitutes and display of their image is pornographic. Sexually active, inviting or pretty women are thus criminalised and their punishment and humiliation is supported in patriarchal legal and moral systems. Williams

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Figure 11. "Try to be more accomodating", Sue Williams, 1991.



Figure 11. "Try to be more accommodating", Sue Williams, 1991.



may need to place the language of abuse in the context of a more rigorous contrast language. This problem can be seen in "Dessert" where the "response" could be described as almost gentle.

Williams' visual language is tough but perhaps her verbal language and use of contrast need to get tougher and more rigorous in response to the criticisms discussed above. Yet when Williams balances image and language with most impact as in "Try to be more accomodating" (Fig. 11), an image reminiscent of Koons "Butt (close up)" (Fig. 3), critics respond that she is "hyperbolic". Williams' strongest language reflects the extremes of sexual polarisation and seems to polarise critical comment. Her refusal to make many concessions can be and is read as reiteration rather than ridicule of patriarchal values. There is a subtext to many such critiques of Sue Williams work which Laura Cottingham identifies:

[T]he prejudice against survivors of abuse comes full cycle with the proclamation that they, somehow, "ask for it", "want and make it happen" (Cottingham, 1992, pp.32-36).

For many spectators, such as Cottingham, the questions of style in Williams' language do not obscure the intent of the work, which is to ridicule the notion of the female desire to be brutally destroyed, a notion which intransigently underlies patriarchal concepts. Ridicule is

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[T]he prejudice against survivors of abuse comes full circle with the proclamation that they, somehow, "ask for it", "want and make it happen" (Coffingham, 1992, pp.22-26).

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Figure 12. "The Inspired Collector", Sue Williams, 1990.



The artist's work is a collection of small, hand-drawn sketches and drawings, many of which are arranged in a grid-like pattern. The sketches are simple and expressive, often depicting figures in various poses and activities. The overall style is reminiscent of a sketchbook or a collection of field notes. The drawings are done in black ink on a light-colored background, and they vary in size and complexity. Some are small and simple, while others are larger and more detailed. The artist's use of a grid-like arrangement suggests a systematic or organized approach to her work, perhaps reflecting the "inspired collector" theme mentioned in the caption.

The sketches are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with some larger drawings interspersed among the smaller ones. The drawings are done in black ink on a light-colored background. The overall style is simple and expressive, often depicting figures in various poses and activities. The artist's use of a grid-like arrangement suggests a systematic or organized approach to her work, perhaps reflecting the "inspired collector" theme mentioned in the caption.

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one of Williams' most subversive techniques, especially in her critique of high art values as arbiters of personal politics. Sado/masochistic theories inform much of the "gender issue" work of certain artists. David Salle situates his nudes (female) as irrevocably "Other", allying them with images of Modernism. In a catalogue essay, Lisa Phillips reveals how the nude and self referential modernist concerns both function as object in art:

The work of art has become primarily a trace of the absent subject/artist - a pure signification of value, endlessly producing proof of itself - as the object of the subject (Phillips, 1986, p.22).

Sue Williams does not let this go unremarked. The subtext is exposed in "The Inspired Collector" (Fig. 12). The painting in the 'Art Gallery' which serves as setting for rape or murder, is instantly recognisable as Salle.

iv Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh - Sounding the Depths.

Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh, who both engage with gender issues, made a video installation in 1992 which related laughter to the image of woman. Louise Walsh, quoted by Moira Roth in the catalogue, states:

We are sick of reacting to Catholicism, to anti-woman laws in Ireland, to constantly being cornered and attacked about feminism, and to being

one of Williams' most subversive techniques, especially in her critique of high art values as arbiters of personal politics. Sado/masochistic theories inform much of the "gender issue" work of certain artists. David Salle situates his nudes (female) as irrevocably "Other", allying them with images of Modernism. In a catalogue essay, Lisa Phillips reveals how the nude and self referential modernist concerns both function as object in art:

The work of art has become primarily a trace of the absent subject/artist - a pure signification of value, endlessly producing proof of itself - as the object of the subject (Phillips, 1986, p.23).

Sue Williams does not let this go unremarked. The subject is exposed in "The Inspired Collector" (Fig. 12). The painting in the 'Art Gallery' which serves as setting for rape or murder, is instantly recognisable as Salle.

iv Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh - Grounding the Depths.

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Figure 13. "Sounding the Depths" (detail), installation, Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh, 1992.

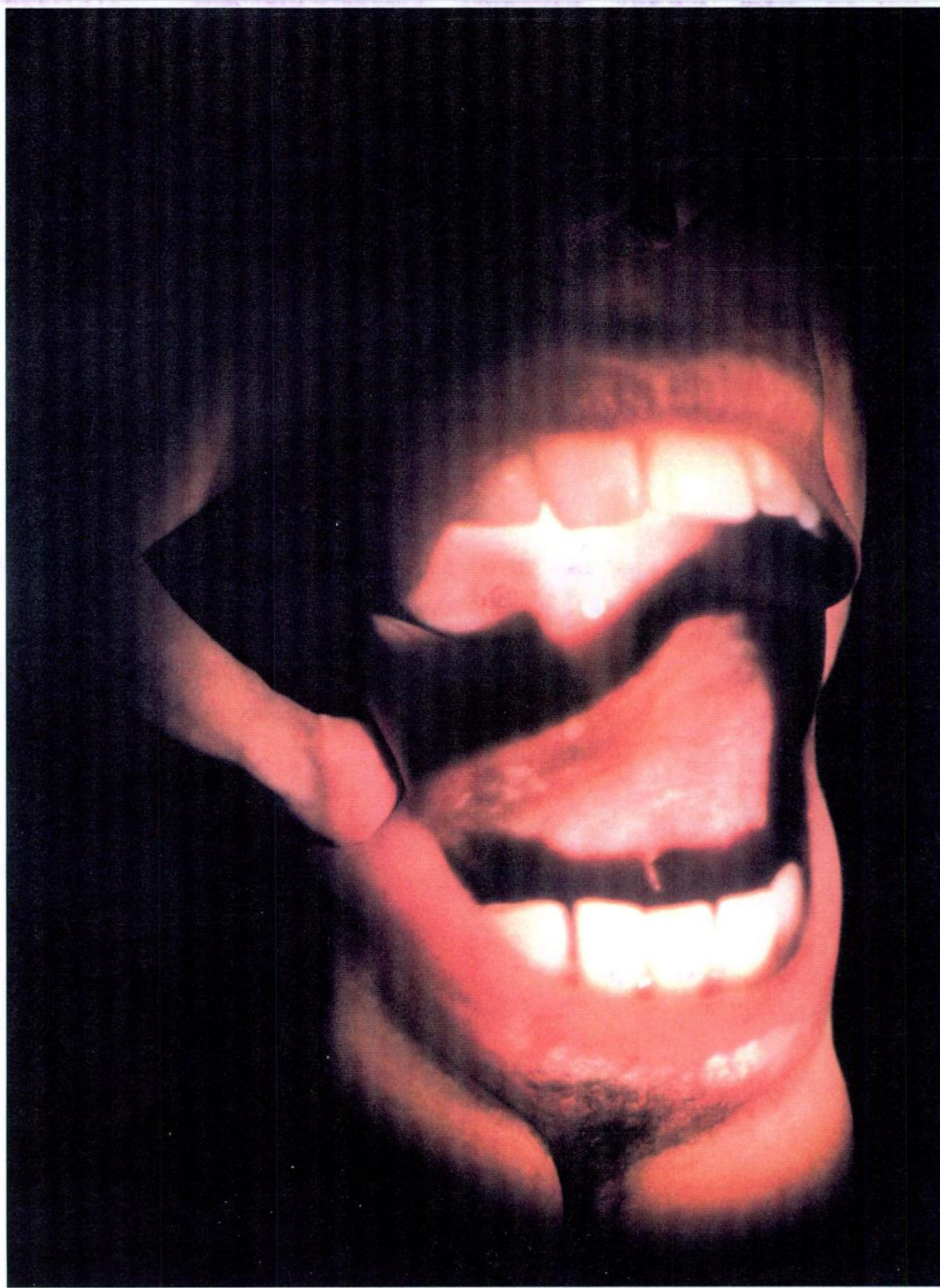
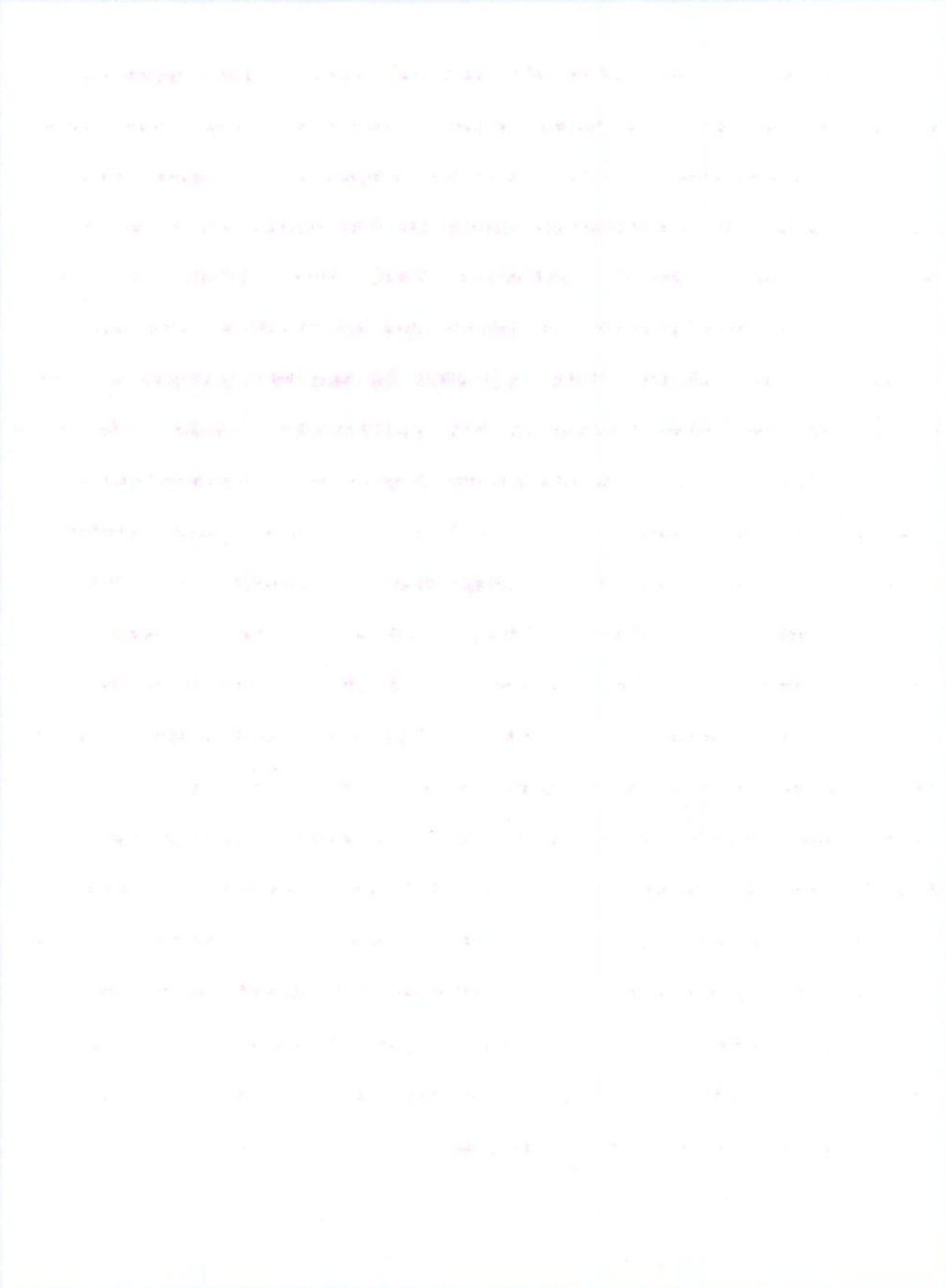


Figure 13. "Sounding the Depths" (detail), installation, Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh, 1992.



seen as the "Other". We are fed up trying to survive, instead of finding a space for all of us to thrive in (Cummins & Walsh, 1992, p.5).

The images in "Sounding the Depths" locate what appears to be a wound on the naked woman. The scar like compressed mouth was related in the piece to images of a closed shell. This image of repression opens on the woman to give voice and laughter. Walsh comments that one intent of the artists in projecting the mouth was to "clothe" the woman, a tactic by which they attempt to subvert uptake of the image of the naked female as the patriarchal "nude" (Walsh, 1993) (Fig. 13). The projected mouth has a resemblance to the vulva and vagina, disturbing in size and power. Cummins and Walsh consciously create a fetish (replacement). Then they break the rules of fetish-creation. The fetish is alive, it has a voice, it is full of pleasure in itself. Pauline Cummins and Louise Walsh steer a course between being "nice" and "ugly". They have used photographs and video advisedly, taking care to avoid images susceptible to patriarchal scopophilic uptake. But the photographic or video image is affected by the patriarchal problematic - perhaps they might have avoided this by presenting the work as a performance. The "vagina dentata" image, although not immediately pleasurable to the male gaze, may have masochistic attraction for some spectators.

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With these exceptions, and they are important, Cummins and Walsh seem to have produced images of the female body which substantially reformulate aesthetic values. They have created work that may offer "looking as a source of pleasure" to those who can see through the patriarchal problematic. Such autoerotic work raises the question of narcissism, to which Louise Walsh replies:

We've been defined for so long, I have been defined as x, y and z. I have been defined as so many different stereotypes in so many different areas of my life, as an artist, as a woman, as an Irishwoman, as a lesbian, as a feminist, as whatever. These definitions are coming from the other, from people outside of my ken, really, and they are all the time defining me.

I want to find myself and my tribe, if you like, I want to explore, I'm fascinated with women and our lack of identity. I don't know where nature versus nurture ends, what is my experience of myself? Is that defined by men, or society or Irishness? Are my experiences because other people made me have them?

Narcissism can be levelled at me because I am looking, exploring, and questioning. I will continue to do so until I am satisfied, and that doesn't mean that I am Narcissistic in the "classic" negative way. I am fascinated with us (Walsh, 1993).

Narcissism for Walsh is about self-examination. The installation may be seen as polarising, valorising the "essential" female. This is the paradox of the nude and sexuality in art as seen in the work of Sprinkle, Williams, Cummins and Walsh. If it makes few concessions to patriarchal visual pleasure it may be read as sustaining a

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polarised economy of gender. If it makes many concessions it is subsumed by the patriarchal problematic or seen as such.

Laura Mulvey, discussing visual pleasure in cinema, favours attack on the current aesthetic of visual pleasure and beauty. She analyses to destroy, to:

[M]ake way for a total negation of the ease and plenitude of the narrative fiction film [painting, sculpture, artwork]. The alternative is the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire (Mulvey, 1985, p.805).

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CONCLUSION

Feminist artists engage with traditional aesthetic values and the art establishment. They attempt to deconstruct the aesthetics of polarised sexuality and dominatory cultural practice. Patriarchal sexual theory proposes gender-specific sex roles, male domination by force and the female as passive and/or criminal. Sado/masochistic concepts extend to the point of necrophilia. Visual aesthetics are informed by oculo-centric theories which invest the signification of power in the "phallus". Proposals that these theories derive from cultural and historical rather than essential biological determinants allow the possibility of change.

The female image and sexuality in art have become fetishes of the repressed image of the female genitalia and body processes and necrophilic fetishes of the repressed conflation of sex and death. Feminist artists may choose to engage with this repression at the level of linguistics and mainly address the concepts of the Symbolic order. Others may choose to engage directly with the specular image of nudity and sexuality and mainly address the concepts of the Imaginary order. Combinations of these approaches may invest verbal language in the specular image of the female.

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Attempts to invest the female image with power may be seen as simple inversion of dominant/submissive models. Attempts to dislodge fetishisation of the female body by displays of female genitalia, sexual acts or abuse of women may be read as the depiction of whores, as pornography. Attempts to invest language in concepts of the female body or to "celebrate" the female body may be read as essentialist. Despite these problems, feminist artists are motivated to continue their analysis and intervention. This initially results in elaboration of an "other" symbolic order which can be seen as sexually polarised. The discourse between women, other non-dominant cultures and the dominant culture may eventually contribute to cultural practices that are non-polarised and non-polarising.

The discourse of non-dominant groups may seem to be swamped by the practices of the dominant culture. In response feminists engage with the law on rape and sexual abuse, an area in which Sue Williams is active, and with the law on pornography. American feminists have tried and failed to implement censorship, as in the Minneapolis Ordinance, which sought to replace the definition of pornography as "the graphic depiction of whores" with definitions such as: "Pornography is a form of discrimination on the basis of sex" (Appendix, p.63) (McManus, 1991). To be a prostitute is:

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To offer (oneself, or another) to unlawful, especially indiscriminate, sexual intercourse, usually for hire; to devote or expose to lewdness (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary).

The point where one may be declared to offer oneself to sexual intercourse is elastic. Formerly, defences of rape often alleged solicitation as a result of dress, sexual history, etc. Recent Irish law reform (1990) disallows such allegations. The defendant must prove that the (adult) woman or other consented to penetration (however slight) by the penis or any object. Conditions for the proof of consent are stringent. However, the plaintiff in rape prosecutions is the State, the woman or other is a witness for the State, sentencing is often lenient. The basic tenet of English and Irish Law is that one cannot claim that which one does not own (O'Connell, 1993). Legal reforms such as the above seem to transfer ownership of the body to women and others - up to a point. The aggressor in rape may often assert the belief that consent has been granted by the woman or other, and feminists contend that this belief (and lenient sentencing for rape) is substantially informed by pornography. Material is declared "pornographic" and subject to censorship at the point where the object of vision is declared a prostitute, an object of sexual consumption. If the image of a woman or other conforms to any of the attributes of a prostitute, they may be assumed to have the capacity to offer unlawful and/or indiscriminate sexual intercourse. Annie Sprinkle

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and Sue Williams attempt to deconstruct these assumptions. However, by the feminist definitions of pornography in the Minneapolis Ordinance the works of Sprinkle, Williams, Cindy Sherman, and others might be judged pornographic. If the Ordinance had become law, it might have restricted access to some of the most subversive feminist contributions to the debate on gender and to much material which discusses the variety of sexual practice, deconstructing the concept of normative sex.

The crux of the matter is the conflation of many sexual activities with prostitution and illegality. Sexual activities are usually deemed unlawful by moral standards which support patrilineal structures. Homosexuality, non-vaginal penetration, control of conception and sexual activity outside marriage have variously, and at certain times, been declared immoral and illegal. This sustains the demand for unlawful persons who will solicit sex for hire, which is criminal in most countries. Legal constraints against procurer or purchaser are usually slight. The prostitute is considered liable and is most likely to serve a gaol sentence. In the event of assault the prostitute may be legally compromised due to solicitation of unlawful sex. A solution proposed by "civil libertarian" rather than feminist theorists is to decriminalise prostitution and dismantle censorship. To propose this is to confirm the degree to which the body and sexual activity are commodities. However, as this is

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already the case, many of those involved in prostitution aim to legalise their profession. They seek to decriminalise sexual acts, have enforceable professional standards and unimpeded access to legal protection from rape and assault. Legalised prostitution implies the deconstruction of many concepts of "unlawful" and "indiscriminate" sexual acts, and depictions thereof would no longer invite punishment and censorship.

The pornography industry, in what may be a response to deconstruction of notions of unlawful sex, has engaged in the ever-more-explicit depiction of subjugatory, violent and lethal images. It seeks to create new orders of "unlawful" sex. Children are in demand as a supposedly AIDS-free commodity, forced into prostitution by poverty or homelessness. Efforts to prevent such practices must focus on the individuals who supply "snuff" movies, brutally sadistic images and children as a sexual commodity. It would seem impossible to support the removal of censorship and other legal constraints that might restrict these activities. However, criminality should not be ascribed to the subjugated "actors" or children who are often under extreme duress, and may die as a result of injury or disease. To concede certain grounds for censorship is to return to the central problem of this issue for feminist and other artists. If one chooses to visually address and attempt to subvert the "snuff" movie or the demand for child prostitutes, the artwork may be censored. It must be

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concluded that censorship is a practice which if enforced restricts the expression of ideas which can deconstruct subjugatory sexual practices and if removed allows the unimpeded proliferation of violent, lethal material. Censorship is ultimately symptomatic of the problem, rather than being any kind of solution. However, in the given situation, there is justification for some (minimal) form of censorship.

The interventions of feminist art may seem like a drop in the ocean of dominant visual culture. However, feminist artists address the ideas at the source of the construction of desire in terms of subjugation of the sexual object. This desire leads to the demand for dominatory sexual practice and the response of censorship. Most popular culture reflects current concepts and ideologies. Feminist art practice aims to deconstruct and reconstruct concepts, attempts to interrupt the ease of the look, disrupt voyeuristic pleasure and expose the discourse between desire, domination and death. It articulates and inscribes what had previously been hidden in the visual aesthetic of the body. Feminist artists, including the author, engage with and aim to subvert a language of the body that may be described as "contaminated" and may be censored. They aim to articulate orders of meaning which can inform the development of cultural practices within which women and others will no longer be situated as objects of dominatory, subjugatory, and necrophilic desire.

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APPENDIX

Source: Feminism and Censorship: the Current Debate, Prism Press, 1988, quoted in McMANUS, Brian, Censorship in the Art Gallery, B.A. Thesis, National College of Art and Design, Dublin, 1991.

Excerpts from the Minneapolis Ordinance.

- (i) Special findings on pornography: The council finds that pornography is central in creating and maintaining civil inequalities of the sexes. Pornography is a systematic practice of exploitation and subordination based on sex which differentially harms women. The bigotry and contempt it promotes, with the acts of aggression it fosters, harm women's opportunities for equality of rights in employment, education, property rights, public accomodation and public services; create public harassment and private designation; promote injury and degradation such as rape, battery and prostitution and inhibit just enforcement of laws against these acts; contribute significantly to restricting women from full exercise of citizenship and participation in public life, including in Neighbourhoods; damage relations between the sexes; and undermine women's equal exercise of rights to speech and action guaranteed to all citizens under the constitution of the United States and the state of Minnesota.

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(ii) Pornography. Pornography is a form of discrimination on the basis of sex.

1. Pornography is the sexually explicit subordination of women, graphically depicted, whether in pictures or in words that also includes one or more of the following:

- (i) women are presented as dehumanised sexual objects, things or commodities; or
- (ii) women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain and humiliation; or
- (iii) women are presented as sexual objects who experience pleasure in being raped; or
- (iv) women are presented as sexual objects tied up or cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or
- (v) women are presented in postures of sexual submission; (or sexual servility, including by inviting penetration); or
- (vi) women's body parts - including but not limited to vagina's, breasts and buttocks are exhibited such that women are reduced to those parts; or
- (vii) women are presented as whores by nature; or
- (viii) women are presented being penetrated by objects or animals; or
- (ix) women are presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, abasement, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual.

2. The use of men, children or transsexuals in the place of women in pornography for the purposes of ... this statute.

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